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MODULATORS OF TNF RECEPTOR ASSOCIATED FACTOR (TRAF), THEIR PREPARATION AND USE

Field of the Invention

The present invention concerns DNA sequences encoding proteins capable of binding to TRAF2, the proteins encoded thereby, and the use of said proteins and DNA sequences in the treatment or prevention of a pathological condition associated with NF-κB induction or with any other activity mediated by TRAF2 or by other molecules to which said proteins bind.

Background of the Invention

The Tumor Necrosis Factor/Nerve Growth Factor (TNF/NGF) receptor superfamily is defined by structural homology between the extracellular domains of its members (Bazan, 1993; Beutler and van Huffel, 1994; Smith et al., 1994). Except for two receptors, the p55 TNF receptor and Fas/APO1, the various members of this receptor family do not exhibit clear similarity of structure in their intracellular domains. Nevertheless, there is much similarity of function between the receptors, indicating that they share common signaling pathways. One example for this similarity is the ability of several receptors of the TNF/NGF family to activate the transcription factor NF-κB. This common ability was ascribed to a capability of a cytoplasmic protein that activates NF-κB, TNF Receptor Associated Factor 2 (TRAF2) to bind to the structurally-dissimilar intracellular domains of several of the receptors of the TNF/NGF family. By what mechanisms does TRAF2 act and how is its responsiveness to the different receptors to which it binds coordinated is not known.

TRAF2 is a member of a recently described family of proteins called TRAF that includes several proteins identified as, for example, TRAF1, TRAF2 (Rothe, M., Wong, s.c., Henzel, W.J. and Goeddel, D (1994) Cell 78:681-692; PCT published application WO 95/33051), TRAF3 (Cheng, G. et al. (1995)), and TRAF6 (see Cao et al., 1996a). All proteins belonging to the TRAF family share high degree of amino acid identity in their C-terminal domains, while their N-terminal domains may be unrelated. As shown in a schematic illustration of TRAF2 (Fig. 1), the molecule contains a ring finger motif and two TFIIIA-like zinc finger motifs at its C-terminal area. The C-terminal half of the molecule

includes a region known as the "TRAF domain" containing a potential leucine zipper region extending between amino acids 264 - 358 (called N-TRAF), and another part towards the carboxy end of the domain between amino acids 359 - 501 (called C-TRAF) which is responsible for TRAF binding to the receptors and to other TRAF molecules to form homo- or heterodimers.

Activation of the transcription factor NF-κB is one manifestation of the signaling cascade initiated by some of the TNF/NGF receptors and mediated by TRAF2. NF-κB comprises members of a family of dimer-forming proteins with homology to the Rel oncogene which, in their dimeric form, act as transcription factors. These factors are ubiquitous and participate in regulation of the expression of multiple genes. Although initially identified as a factor that is constitutively present in B cells at the stage of Igκ light chain expression, NF-κB is known primarily for its action as an inducible transcriptional activator. In most known cases NF-κB behaves as a primary factor, namely the induction of its activity is by activation of pre-existing molecules present in the cell in their inactive form, rather than its de-novo synthesis which in turn relies on inducible transcription factors that turn-on the NF-κB gene. The effects of NF-κB are highly pleiotropic. Most of these numerous effects share the common features of being quickly induced in response to an extracellular stimulus. The majority of the NF-κB-activating agents are inducers of immune defense, including components of viruses and bacteria, cytokines that regulate immune response, UV light and others. Accordingly, many of the genes regulated by NF-κB contribute to immune defense (see Blank et al., 1992; Grilli et al., 1993; Baeuerle and Henkel, 1994, for reviews).

One major feature of NF-κB-regulation is that this factor can exist in a cytoplasmic non-DNA binding form which can be induced to translocate to the nucleus, bind DNA and activate transcription. This dual form of the NF-κB proteins is regulated by I-κB - a family of proteins that contain repeats of a domain that has initially been discerned in the erythrocyte protein ankyrin (Gilmore and Morin, 1993). In the unstimulated form, the NF-κB dimer occurs in association with an I-κB molecule which imposes on it cytoplasmic location and prevents its interaction with the NF-κB-binding DNA sequence and activation of transcription. The dissociation of I-κB from the NF-κB dimer constitutes the critical step of its activation by many of its inducing agents (DiDonato et al., 1995). Knowledge of the

mechanisms that are involved in this regulation is still limited. There is also just little understanding of the way in which cell specificity in terms of responsiveness to the various NF-κB-inducing agents is determined.

One of the most potent inducing agents of NF-κB is the cytokine tumor necrosis factor (TNF). There are two different TNF receptors, the p55 and p75 receptors. Their expression levels vary independently among different cells (Vandenabeele et al., 1995). The p75 receptor responds preferentially to the cell-bound form of TNF (TNF is expressed both as a beta-transmembrane protein and as a soluble protein) while the p55 receptor responds just as effectively to soluble TNF molecules (Grell et al., 1995). The intracellular domains of the two receptors are structurally unrelated and bind different cytoplasmic proteins. Nevertheless, at least part of the effects of TNF, including the cytocidal effect of TNF and the induction of NF-κB, can be induced by both receptors. This feature is cell specific. The p55 receptor is capable of inducing a cytocidal effect or activation of NF-κB in all cells that exhibit such effects in response to TNF. The p75-R can have such effects only in some cells. Others, although expressing the p75-R at high levels, show induction of the effects only in response to stimulation of the p55-R (Vandenabeele et al., 1995). Apart from the TNF receptors, various other receptors of the TNF/NGF receptor family: CD30 (McDonald et al., 1995), CD40 (Berberich et al., 1994; Lalmanach-Girard et al., 1993), the lymphotoxin beta receptor and, in a few types of cells, Fas/APO1 (Rensing-Ehl et al., 1995), are also capable of inducing activation of NF-κB. The IL-1 type I receptor, also effectively triggering NF-κB activation, shares most of the effects of the TNF receptors despit the fact that it has no structural similarity to them.

The activation of NF-κB upon triggering of these various receptors results from induced phosphorylation of its associated I-κB molecules. This phosphorylation tags I-κB to degradation, which most likely occurs in the proteasome. The nature of the kinase that phosphorylates I-κB, and its mechanism of activation upon receptor triggering is still unknown. However, in the recent two years some knowledge has been gained as to the identity of three receptor-associated proteins that appear to take part in initiation of the phosphorylation (see diagrammatic illustration in Figures 2a and 6). A protein called TRAF2, initially cloned by D. Goeddel and his colleagues (Rothe et al., 1994), seems to play a central role in NF-κB-activation by the various receptors of the TNF/NGF family. The protein, which when expressed at high levels can by itself trigger NF-κB activation,

binds to activated p75 TNF-R (Rothe et al., 1994), lymphotoxin beta receptor (Mosialos et al., 1995), CD40 (Rothe et al., 1995a) and CD-30 (unpublished data) and mediates the induction of NF-κB by them. TRAF2 does not bind to the p55 TNF receptor nor to Fas/APO1, however, it can bind to a p55 receptor-associated protein called TRADD and TRADD has the ability to bind to a Fas/APO1-associated protein called MORT1 (or FADD - see Boldin et al. 1995b and 1996). Another receptor-interacting protein, called RIP (see Stanger et al., 1995) is also capable of interacting with TRAF2 as well as with FAS/APO1, TRADD, the p55 TNF receptor and MORT-1. Thus, while RIP has been associated with cell cytotoxicity induction (cell death), its ability to interact with TRAF2 also implicates it in NF-κB activation and it also may serve in addition to augment the interaction between FAS/APO1, MORT-1, p55 TNF receptor and TRADD with TRAF2 in the pathway leading to NF-κB activation. These associations apparently allow the p55 TNF receptor and Fas/APO1 to trigger NF-κB activation (Hsu et al., 1995; Boldin et al., 1995; Chinnalyan et al., 1995; Varfolomeev et al., 1996; Hsu et al., 1996). The triggering of NF-κB activation by the IL-1 receptor occurs independently of TRAF2 and may involve a recently-cloned IL-1 receptor-associated protein-kinase called IRAK (Croston et al., 1995).

By what mechanism TRAF2 acts is not clear. Several cytoplasmic molecules that bind to TRAF2 have been identified (Rothe et al., 1994; Rothe et al., 1995b). However, the information on these molecules does not provide any clue as to the way by which TRAF2, which by itself does not possess any enzymatic activity, triggers the phosphorylation of I-κB. There is also no information yet of mechanisms that dictate cell-specific pattern of activation of TRAF2 by different receptors, such as observed for the induction of NF-κB by the two TNF receptors.

In addition to the above mentioned, of the various TRAF proteins, it should also be noted that TRAF2 binds to the p55 (CD120a) and p75 (CD120b) TNF receptors, as well as to several other receptors of the TNF/NGF receptor family, either directly or indirectly via other adpator proteins as noted above, for example with reference to the FAS/APO1 receptor, and the adaptor proteins MORT-1, TRADD and RIP. As such, TRAF2 is crucial for the activation of NF-κB (see also Wallach, 1996). However, TRAF3 actually inhibits activation of NF-κB by some receptors of the TNF/NGF family (see Rothe et al., 1995a), whilst TRAF6 is required for induction of NF-κB by IL-1 (see Cao et al., 1996a).

Accordingly, as regards NF-κB activation and its importance in maintaining cell viability, the various intracellular pathways involved in this activation have heretofore not been clearly elucidated, for example, how the various TRAF proteins, are involved directly or indirectly.

Furthermore, as is now known regarding various members of the TNF/NGF receptor family and their associated intracellular signaling pathways inclusive of various adaptor, mediator/modulator proteins (see brief reviews and references in, for example, co-pending co-owned Israel Patent Application Nos. 114615, 114986, 115319, 116588), TNF and the FAS/APO1 ligand, for example, can have both beneficial and deleterious effects on cells. TNF, for example, contributes to the defence of the organism against tumors and infectious agents and contributes to recovery from injury by inducing the killing of tumor cells and virus-infected cells, augmenting antibacterial activities of granulocytes, and thus in these cases the TNF-induced cell killing is desirable. However, excess TNF can be deleterious and as such TNF is known to play a major pathogenic role in a number of diseases such as septic shock, anorexia, rheumatic diseases, inflammation and graft-vs-host reactions. In such cases TNF-induced cell killing is not desirable. The FAS/APO1 ligand, for example, also has desirable and deleterious effects. This FAS/APO1 ligand induces via its receptor the killing of autoreactive T cells during maturation of T cells, i.e. the killing of T cells which recognize self-antigens, during their development and thereby preventing autoimmune diseases. Further, various malignant cells and HIV-infected cells carry the FAS/APO1 receptor on their surface and can thus be destroyed by activation of this receptor by its ligand or by antibodies specific thereto, and thereby activation of cell death (apoptosis) intracellular pathways mediated by this receptor. However, the FAS/APO1 receptor may mediate deleterious effects, for example, uncontrolled killing of tissue which is observed in certain diseases such as acute hepatitis that is accompanied by the destruction of liver cells.

In view of the above, namely, that receptors of the TNF/NGF family can induce cell death pathways on the one hand and can induce cell survival pathways (via NF-κB induction) on the other hand, there apparently exists a fine balance, intracellularly between these two opposing pathways. For example, when it is desired to achieve maximal destruction of cancer cells or other infected or diseased cells, it would be desired to have TNF and/or the FAS/APO1 ligand inducing only the cell death pathway without inducing

NF-κB. Conversely, when it is desired to protect cells such as in, for example, inflammation, graft-vs-host reactions, acute hepatitis, it would be desirable to block the cell killing induction of TNF and/or FAS/APO1 ligand and enhance, instead, their induction of NF-κB. Likewise, in certain pathological circumstances it would be desirable to block the intracellular signaling pathways mediated by the p75 TNF receptor and the IL-1 receptor, while in others it would be desirable to enhance these intracellular pathways.

Summary of the Invention

It is an object of the invention to provide novel proteins, including all isoforms, analogs, fragments or derivatives thereof which are capable of binding to the tumor necrosis factor receptor-associated (TRAF) proteins. As the TRAF proteins are involved in the modulation or mediation of the activation of the transcription factor NF-κB, which is initiated by some of the TNF/NGF receptors, as well as others as noted above, the novel proteins of the present invention by binding to TRAF proteins are therefore capable of affecting (modulating or mediating) the intracellular signaling processes initiated by various ligands (e.g. TNF, FAS ligand and others) binding to their receptors such as, for example, their modulation/mediation of NF-κB activation, via interaction directly or indirectly with TRAF proteins.

The novel proteins of the present invention are therefore direct modulators/mediators of the intracellular biological activity of TRAF proteins (e.g. induction of NF-κB activation by TRAF2 and TRAF6 and inhibition of NF-κB activation, by TRAF3).

The novel proteins of the invention are likewise indirect modulators/mediators of the intracellular biological activity of a variety of other proteins which are capable of interacting with TRAF proteins directly or indirectly (e.g. FAS/APO1 receptor, p55 TNF receptor, p75 TNF receptor, IL-1 receptor and their associated proteins, such as, for example, MORT-1, TRADD, RIP).

Another object of the invention is to provide antagonists (e.g. antibodies, peptides, organic compounds, or even some isoforms) to the above novel TRAF-binding proteins, including isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof, which may be used to inhibit the signaling process, or, more specifically, to inhibit the activation of NF-κB and its associated involvement in cell-survival processes, when desired. Likewise, when the TRAF-

binding proteins of the invention or the TRAF protein to which they bind (e.g. TRAF3) are themselves inhibitory for NF-κB activation, then it is an object to provide antagonists to these TRAF-binding proteins to activate the signaling process or more specifically, to block the inhibition of NF-κB activation and hence bring about enhanced NF-κB activation, when desired.

A further object of the invention is to use the above novel TRAF-binding proteins, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof, to isolate and characterize additional proteins or factors, which may be involved in regulation of TRAF protein activity and/or the above noted receptor activity, e.g. other proteins which may bind to TRAF proteins and influence their activity, and/or to isolate and identify other receptors or other cellular proteins further upstream or downstream in the signaling process(es) to which these novel proteins, analogs, fragments and derivatives bind, and hence, in whose function they are also involved.

A still further object of the invention is to provide inhibitors which can be introduced into cells to bind or interact with the novel TRAF-binding proteins and possible isoforms thereof, which inhibitors may act to inhibit TRAF protein-associated activity in, for example, NF-κB activation and hence, when desired, to inhibit NF-κB activation; or which may act to inhibit inhibitory TRAF-associated activity (e.g. TRAF3) in NF-κB activation and hence, when desired, to enhance NF-κB activation.

Moreover, it is an object of the present invention to use the above-mentioned novel TRAF-binding proteins, isoforms and analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof as antigens for the preparation of polyclonal and/or monoclonal antibodies thereto. The antibodies, in turn, may be used, for example, for the purification of the new proteins from different sources, such as cell extracts or transformed cell lines.

Furthermore, these antibodies may be used for diagnostic purposes, e.g. for identifying disorders related to abnormal functioning of cellular effects mediated directly by TRAF proteins or mediated by the p55 TNF receptor, FAS/APO1 receptor, or other related receptors and their associated cellular proteins (e.g. MORT-1, TRADD, RIP), which act directly or indirectly to modulate/mediate intracellular processes via interaction with TRAF proteins.

A further object of the invention is to provide pharmaceutical compositions comprising the above novel TRAF proteins, isoforms, or analogs, fragments or derivatives

thereof, as well as pharmaceutical compositions comprising the above noted antibodies or other antagonists.

In accordance with the present invention, a number of novel TRAF-binding proteins, in particular, TRAF2-binding proteins, have been isolated. These TRAF2-binding proteins have high specificity of binding to TRAF2 (see Examples below) and hence are modulators or mediators of TRAF2 intracellular activity. TRAF2 is involved in the modulation or mediation of at least one intracellular signaling pathway being the cell survival- or viability- related pathway in which Traf 2 is directly involved in activation of NF-κB which plays a central role in cell survival. In fact, one of these new proteins, called NIK (for 'NF-κB inducing kinase') binds to TRAF2 and stimulates NF-κB activity. NIK is a kinase sharing sequence similarity with several MAPKK kinases (see below). Further, TRAF2 by being capable of interaction directly or indirectly with the above noted p55 TNF receptor, p75 TNF receptor, FAS/APO1 receptors and their associated proteins MORT-1, TRADD and RIP, also is a mediator or modulator of the NF-κB induction or activation activity attributed to these receptors. TRAF2 is therefore a modulator/mediator of the cell survival pathways (as opposed to the cell death pathways) mediated by these receptors and their associated proteins and as such the extent of interaction between these receptors and/or proteins with TRAF2 is an important factor in the outcome of the activity of these receptors (once activated by their ligands), namely, whether the cells will survive or die. Accordingly, the proteins of the invention, for example, NIK, play a key role in this interaction between TRAF2 and the other proteins/receptors with which TRAF2 interacts, as proteins such as NIK by binding specifically to TRAF2 will modulate its activity and/or will have their activity modulated by interaction with TRAF2.

The TRAF-binding proteins, such as, for example, the TRAF2-binding proteins, including NIK, have been isolated and cloned using the two-hybrid system, partially and fully sequenced, and characterized, and as is detailed herein below appear to be highly specific TRAF2-binding proteins, and hence specific TRAF2 modulators/mediators.

As will be used herein throughout, TRAF protein activity, for example TRAF2 activity, is meant to include its activity in modulation/mediation in the cell survival pathway, especially as concerns NF-κB induction/activation. Likewise, as used herein throughout TRAF-binding protein, in particular TRAF2-binding protein, activity is meant to include their modulation/mediation of TRAF-, in particular, TRAF2- activity by virtue of

their specific binding to TRAF, especially TRAF2 proteins, this modulation/mediation including modulation/mediation of cell survival pathways, in particular, those relating to NF-κB activation/induction in which TRAF proteins, especially TRAF2 is involved directly or indirectly and as such TRAF or TRAF2-binding protein may be considered as indirect modulator/mediators of all the above mentioned proteins and possibly a number of others which are involved in cell survival, especially NF-κB activation/induction and to which TRAF2 (or other TRAF proteins) binds, or with which TRAF2 (or other TRAF proteins) interacts in a direct or indirect fashion.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a DNA sequence encoding a protein capable of binding to a tumor necrosis factor receptor-associated (TRAF) molecule.

One embodiment of the DNA sequence of the invention is a sequence encoding a protein capable of binding to TRAF2.

Another embodiment of the DNA sequence of the invention is a sequence encoding a protein capable of binding to at least the amino acid residues 222-501 of the amino acid sequence of TRAF2

Other embodiments of the DNA sequence of the invention include :

(a) a cDNA sequence of the herein designated clone 9 comprising the nucleotide sequence depicted in Fig 3a.;

(b) a cDNA sequence of the herein designated clone 10 comprising the nucleotide sequence depicted in Fig 4;

(c) a cDNA sequence of the herein designated clone 15 comprising the nucleotide sequence depicted in Fig. 5a;

(d) a fragment of a sequence (a)-(c) which encodes a biologically active protein capable of binding to least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2;

(e) a DNA sequence capable of hybridization to a sequence of (a)-(d) under moderately stringent conditions and which encodes a biologically active protein capable of binding to at least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2; and

(f) a DNA sequence which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to the DNA sequences defined in (a)-(e) and which encodes a biologically active protein capable of binding to at least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2.

Yet other embodiments of the DNA sequence of the invention noted above include :

A DNA sequence selected from the sequences contained in the herein designated cDNA clones 9 and 15;

A DNA sequence which encodes a protein that also modulates NF-κB activity; and

A DNA sequence selected from the sequences contained in the herein designated cDNA clone 10.

An additional preferred embodiment of the above DNA sequences of the invention is a DNA sequence comprising the DNA sequence encoding the protein NIK (for 'NF-κB inducing kinase').

Embodiments of the above DNA sequence of the invention encoding the protein NIK include :

(i) A DNA sequence encoding the protein NIK, isoforms, fragments or analogs thereof, said NIK, isoforms, fragments or analogs thereof being capable of binding to TRAF2 and which is capable of modulating the activity of NF-κB;

(ii) A DNA sequence as in (i) above, selected from the group consisting of :

a) a cDNA sequence derived from the coding region of a native NIK protein;

b) DNA sequences capable of hybridization to a sequence of (a) under moderately stringent conditions and which encode a biologically active NIK; and

c) DNA sequences which are degenerate as a result of the genetic code to the sequences defined in (a) and (b) and which encode a biologically active NIK protein;

(iii) A DNA sequence as in (i) or (ii) above comprising at least part of the sequence depicted in Fig. 6 and encoding at least one active NIK protein, isoform, analog or fragment;

(iv) A DNA sequence as in (iii) above encoding a NIK protein, isoform, analog or fragment having at least part of the amino acid sequence depicted in Fig. 6.

In another aspect, the invention provides proteins or polypeptides encoded by the above noted DNA coding sequences of the invention, the isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives of said proteins and polypeptides, provided that they are capable of binding to TRAF2, preferably to at least the 222-501 amino acid sequenced of TRAF2. Embodiments of these proteins/polypeptides, and their isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives according to the invention include :

(a) a protein being the protein encoded by herein designated clone 10;

(b) a protein, isoforms, fragments, analogs and derivatives thereof, being the NIK protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof encoded by the above noted DNA sequences encoding said NIK protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives; and

(c) a NIK protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof being the NIK protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof encoded by the above noted DNA sequences encoding said NIK protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives, wherein said protein, isoforms, fragments and derivatives have at least part of the amino acid sequence depicted in Fig. 6.

In yet another aspect, the invention provides a vector comprising any of the above DNA sequences according to the invention which are capable of being expressed in host cells selected from prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells; and the transformed prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells containing said vector.

The invention also provides a method for producing a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative encoded by any of the above DNA sequences according to the invention which comprises growing the above mentioned transformed host cells under conditions suitable for the expression of said protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments or derivatives, effecting post-translational modification, as necessary, for obtaining said protein, isoform, analogs, fragments or derivatives and isolating said expressed protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments or derivatives.

In a further aspect, the invention provides antibodies or active fragments or derivatives thereof, specific for the above TRAF-binding proteins, analogs, isoforms, fragments or derivatives thereof or specific for the NIK protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative thereof noted above.

In a different aspect, the invention provides the following screening methods:

(i) A method for screening of a ligand capable of binding to a protein according to the invention, as noted above, including isoforms, analogs, fragments or derivatives thereof, comprising contacting an affinity chromatography matrix to which said protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative is attached with a cell extract whereby the ligand is bound to said matrix, and eluting, isolating and analyzing said ligand.

(ii) A method for screening of a DNA sequence coding for a ligand capable of binding to a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative according to the invention as noted above, comprising applying the yeast two-hybrid procedure in which a sequence encoding said protein, isoform analog, derivative or fragment is carried by one hybrid vector and sequences from a cDNA or genomic DNA library are carried by the second hybrid vector, transforming yeast host cells with said vectors, isolating the positively transformed cells, and extracting said second hybrid vector to obtain a sequence encoding said ligand.

Similarly, there is also provided a method for isolating and identifying proteins, isoforms, analogs, fragments according to the invention noted above, capable of binding directly to TRAF2, comprising applying the yeast two-hybrid procedure in which a sequence encoding said TRAF2 is carried by one hybrid vector and sequence from a cDNA or genomic DNA library is carried by the second hybrid vector, the vectors then being used to transform yeast host cells and the positive transformed cells being isolated, followed by extraction of the said second hybrid vector to obtain a sequence encoding a protein which binds to said TRAF2.

In yet another aspect of the invention there is provided a method for the modulation or mediation in cells of the activity of NF-κB or any other intracellular signaling activity modulated or mediated by TRAF2 or by other molecules to which a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative thereof of the invention as noted above, said method comprising treating said cells by introducing into said cells one or more of said protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative thereof in a form suitable for intracellular introduction thereof, or introducing into said cells a DNA sequence encoding said one or more protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative thereof in the form of a suitable vector carrying said sequence, said vector being capable of effecting the insertion of said sequence into said cells in a way that said sequence is expressed in said cells.

Embodiments of this above method for modulation/mediation in cells of the activity of NF-κB or any other intracellular signaling activity modulated or mediated by TRAF2 or other molecules include :

(i) A method as above, wherein said treating of cells comprises introducing into said cells a DNA sequence encoding said protein, isoform, fragment, analog or derivative in the form of a suitable vector carrying said sequence, said vector being capable of effecting the

insertion of said sequence into said cells in a way that said sequence is expressed in said cells.

(ii) A method as above wherein said treating of said cells is by transfection of said cells with a recombinant animal virus vector comprising the steps of :

(a) constructing a recombinant animal virus vector carrying a sequence encoding a viral surface protein (ligand) that is capable of binding to a specific cell surface receptor on the surface of said cells to be treated and a second sequence encoding a protein selected from the said protein, isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives according to the invention,that when expressed in said cells is capable of modulating/mediating the activity of NF-κB or any other intracellular signaling activity modulated/mediated by TRAF2 or other said molecules; and

(b) infecting said cells with said vector of (a).

Likewise, the present invention also provides a method for modulating TRAF2 modulated/mediated effect on cells comprising treating said cells with the antibodies or active fragments or derivatives thereof, according to the invention as noted above, said treating being by application of a suitable composition containing said antibodies, active fragments or derivatives thereof to said cells, wherein when the TRAF2-binding protein or portions thereof of said cells are exposed on the extracellular surface, said composition is formulated for extracellular application, and when said TRAF2-binding proteins are intracellular said composition is formulated for intracellular application.

Other methods of the invention for modulating the TRAF2 modulated/mediated effect on cells include :

(i) A method comprising treating said cells with an oligonucleotide sequence encoding an antisense sequence for at least part of the DNA sequence encoding a TRAF2-binding protein, this DNA sequence being any of the above mentioned ones of the invention, said oligonucleotide sequence being capable of blocking the expression of the TRAF2-binding protein.

(ii) A method as in (i) above wherein said oligonucleotide sequence is introduced to said cells via a recombinant virus as noted above, wherein said second sequence of said virus encodes said oligonucleotide sequence.

(iii) A method comprising applying the ribozyme procedure in which a vector encoding a ribozyme sequence capable of interacting with a cellular mRNA sequence

encoding a TRAF2-binding protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative of the invention noted above, is introduced into said cells in a form that permits expression of said ribozyme sequence in said cells, and wherein when said ribozyme sequence is expressed in said cells it interacts with said cellular mRNA sequence and cleaves said mRNA sequence resulting in the inhibition of expression of said TRAF2-binding protein in said cells.

It should be noted that for all the above methods of the invention the protein of the invention as indicated, can be specifically NIK or at least one of the NIK isoforms, analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof.

In the above methods and embodiments thereof of the invention there is included also a method for the prevention or treatment of a pathological condition associated with NF-κB induction or with any other activity mediated by TRAF2 or by other molecules to which a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative, according to the invention, binds, said method comprising administering to a patient in need an effective amount of a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative, according to the invention, or a DNA molecule coding therefor, or a molecule capable of disrupting the interaction of said protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative, with TRAF2 or any other molecule to which said protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative binds. In this method of the invention, said protein of the invention administered to the patient in need can be specifically the protein encoded by clone 10, NIK, an isoform, analog, derivative or fragment of NIK, or a DNA molecule coding therefor. The protein encoded by clone 10 acts to inhibit NF-κB induction, as do other fragments of NIK, while NIK induces NF-κB activation.

In an additional aspect of the invention there is provided a pharmaceutical composition for the modulation of the TRAF2 modulated/mediated effect on cells comprising, as active ingredient at least one of the TRAF2-binding proteins, according to the invention, its biologically active fragments, analogs, derivatives or mixtures thereof.

Other pharmaceutical compositions or embodiments thereof according to the invention include :

(i) A pharmaceutical composition for modulating the TRAF2 modulated/mediated effect on cells comprising, as active ingredient, a recombinant animal virus vector encoding a protein capable of binding a cell surface receptor and encoding at least one TRAF2-binding protein, isoform, active fragments or analogs, according to the invention.

(ii) A pharmaceutical composition for modulating the TRAF2-modulated/mediated effect on cells comprising as active ingredient, an oligonucleotide sequence encoding an anti-sense sequence of the TRAF2-binding protein mRNA sequence according to the invention.

A further embodiment of the above pharmaceutical composition is specifically a pharmaceutical composition for the prevention or treatment of a pathological condition associated with NF-κB induction or with any other activity mediated by TRAF2 or by other molecules to which a protein, analog, isoform, fragment or derivative, according to the invention binds, said composition comprising an effective amount of a protein, analog, isoform, fragment or derivative, according to the invention or a DNA molecule coding therefor, or a molecule capable of disrupting the interaction of said protein, analog, isoform, fragment or derivative, with TRAF2 or any other molecule to which said protein, analog, isoform, fragment or derivative, binds. In a yet further specific embodiment said pharmaceutical composition comprising an effective amount of the protein encoded by clone 10, NIK, an isoform, analog, derivative or fragment of NIK, or a DNA molecule coding therefor.

In yet another specific embodiment, the invention provides a pharmaceutical composition for the prevention or treatment of a pathological condition associated with NF-κB induction or with any other activity mediated by TRAF2 or by other molecules to which the protein NIK binds, said composition comprising a molecule capable of interfering with the protein kinase activity of NIK. In this composition, the interfering molecule may be an effective amount of NIK mutated in active site residues, this mutated NIK serving to interfere with native NIK, in particular, the kinase activity of NIK.

One known condition associated with NF-κB induction (abnormal) is AIDS, others are e.g. autoimmune diseases, as well as tumors.

Still further aspects and embodiments of the invention are :

(i) A method for identifying and producing a ligand capable of modulating the cellular activity modulated/mediated by TRAF2 comprising :

a) screening for a ligand capable of binding to a polypeptide comprising at least a portion of TRAF2 having the amino acid residues 221-501 of TRAF2;

b) identifying and characterizing a ligand, other than TRAF2 or portions of a receptor of the TNF/NGF receptor family, found by said screening step to be capable of said binding; and

c) producing said ligand in substantially isolated and purified form.

(ii) A method for identifying and producing a ligand capable of modulating the cellular activity modulated/mediated by a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative, according to the invention, comprising :

a) screening for a ligand capable of binding to a polypeptide comprising at least a portion of the NIK sequence depicted in Fig. 6;

b) identifying and characterizing a ligand, other than TRAF2 or portions of a receptor of the TNF/NGF receptor family, found by said screening step to be capable of said binding; and

c) producing said ligand in substantially isolated and purified form.

(iii) A method for identifying and producing a ligand capable of modulating the cellular activity modulated/mediated by NIK comprising :

a) screening for a ligand capable of binding to a polypeptide comprising at least a portion of the NIK sequence depicted in Fig. 6;

b) identifying and characterizing a ligand, other than TRAF2 or portions of a receptor of the TNF/NGF receptor family, found by said screening step to be capable of said binding; and

c) producing said ligand in substantially isolated and purified form.

(iv) A method for identifying and producing a ligand capable of directly or indirectly modulating the cellular activity modulated/mediated by NIK comprising :

a) screening for a molecule capable of modulating activities modulated/mediated by NIK;

b) identifying and characterizing said molecule; and

c) producing said molecule in substantially isolated and purified form.

(v) A method for identifying and producing a molecule capable of directly or indirectly modulating the cellular activity modulated/mediated by a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative of the invention, comprising :

a) screening for a molecule capable of modulating activities modulated/mediated by a protein, isoform, analog, fragment or derivative according to the invention;

b) identifying and characterizing said molecule; and

c) producing said molecule in substantially isolated and purified form.

Other aspects and embodiments of the present invention are also provided as arising from the following detailed description of the invention.

It shoud be noted that, where used throughout, the following terms : "modulation/mediation of the TRAF (or TRAF2) effect on cells" and any other such "modulation/mediation" mentioned in the specification are understood to encompass *in vitro* as well as *in vivo* treatment and, in addition, also to encompass inhibition or enhancement/augmentation.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 shows a diagramatic illustration of the structure of the TRAF2 molecule.

Figs. 2A-B ~~Fig. 2a-b~~ shows schematic diagrams illustrating some of the proteins involved in NF-kB activation, including the new TRAF-binding proteins of the present invention (e.g. NIK), in which Fig. 2A ~~(a)~~ is a partial scheme and Fig. 2B ~~(b)~~ is a more complete scheme;

Figs. 3A-D ~~Figs. 3a-b~~ show the nucleotide sequence (SEQ ID NO:1) of the 5' end of clone 9 (a) and the deduced amino acid sequence (SEQ ID NO:2) ~~sequenced~~ encoded thereby ~~(b)~~ (Fig. 3D);

Figs. 4A-B ~~Fig. 4~~ shows the nucleotide sequence (SEQ ID NO:3) of clone 10;

Figs. 5A-B ~~Figs. 5a-b~~ show the nucleotide sequence (SEQ ID NO:4) of clone 15 ~~(a)~~ (Fig. 5A) and the deduced amino acid sequence (SEQ ID NO:5) encoded thereby ~~(b)~~ (Fig. 5B);

Figs. 6A-G ~~Fig. 6~~ shows the nucleotide sequence (SEQ ID NO:6) and the deduced amino acid sequence (SEQ ID NO:7) of NIK; and

Figs. 7A-B ~~Fig. 7~~ shows an alignment of the sequence of protein NIK (S9, SEQ ID NO:14) with the sequence of the mouse protein kinase mMEKK (mouse MAPK or ERK Kinase Kinase) (SEQ ID NO:12) and a number of other kinases. The regions corresponding to the conserved motifs I to XI in protein kinases are marked. C'

INS C'

Detailed Description of the Invention

The present invention relates to DNA sequences encoding proteins capable of binding to a tumor necrosis factor receptor-associated factor (TRAF) molecule, and the proteins encoded thereby.

In a prefered embodiment, the present invention concerns cDNA sequences herein designated clone 9, clone 10 and clone 15 (depicited in Figs. 3a, 4 and 5a, respectively), which encode for proteins capable of binding to TRAF2, and the proteins encoded by those DNA sequences.

In a further preferred embodiment the invention relates to the DNA sequence encoding the NIK protein, and the NIK protein itself.

The DNA and the deduced amino acid sequences mentioned above represent new sequences; they do not appear in the 'GENEBANK' or 'PROTEIN BANK' data banks of DNA or amino acid sequences.

Within the scope of the present invention are also fragments of the above mentioned DNA sequences and DNA sequences capable of hybridization to those sequences or part of them, under moderately stringent conditions, provided they encode a biologically active protein or polypeptide capable of binding to at least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2.

The present invention also concerns a DNA sequence which is degenerate as a result of the genetic code to the above mentioned DNA sequences and which encodes a biologically active protein or polypeptide capable of binding to at least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2.

As regards TRAF2, it should be noted that several members of the TNF/NGF receptor family activate the transcription factor NF-κB by direct or indirect association with TRAF2, which is thus an adaptor protein for these receptors and may thus also be considered as a modulator/mediator of the induction of NF-κB activation activity of these TNF/NGF receptors (see the scheme in Fig. 2b). Another receptor, the IL-1 receptor activates NF-κB independently of TRAF2. One of the embodiments of a preferred TRAF2-binding protein in accordance with the present invention is the NIK protein, which binds NIK in a very specific way and stimulates NF-κB activity. NIK is a serine/threonine kinase having sequence similarity with several MAPKK kinases (see Examples below). NIK analogs or muteins produced in accordance with the present invention (see Examples)

which lack the kinase activity of NIK fail to stimulate NF-κB activation, when these analogs/muteins are expressed in cells. Further, such NIK analogs/muteins when expressed in cells also block NF-κB induction by TNF as well as by other inducing agents such as the bacterial endotoxin LPS, forbol myristate acetate (a protein kinase C activator), and the HTLV-1 protein TAX. TNF induction of NF-κB activity is via either of the two TNF receptors (p55 and p75 TNF receptors) and hence it appears that the NIK mutein/analogs block induction of NF-κB activation via these receptors. Likewise, TNF and the FAS/APO1 receptor ligand may also induce NF-κB activity via a related receptor, the FAS/APO1 receptor, which induction is also blocked by NIK muteins/analogs. Moreover, the above receptors have adaprot proteins TRADD, RIP and MORT1 which can all also induce NF-κB activity, but which induction is also blocked by NIK muteins/analogs. In addition, such NIK muteins/analogs also blocked NF-κB induction by IL-1 (functioning via the IL-1 receptor). Accordingly, it arises that NIK participates in an NF-κB-inducing cascade that is common to receptors of the TNF/NGF family and to the IL-1 receptor. NIK also appears to act in a direct way in inducing NF-κB activation possibly by enhancing I-κB phosphorylation directly. This arises from the present observations that the above NIK analogs/muteins lacking kinase activity (also called dominant-negative mutants) when expressed in cells did not effect in any manner the TNF-induced activation of <u>Jun</u> kinase, indicating that NIK acts specifically to enhance phosphorylation of I-κB without affecting the MAP kinase involved in Jun phosphorylation.

Thus, the present invention concerns the DNA sequences encoding biologically active TRAF-binding proteins, e.g. TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example, NIK, as well as analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof, and the analogs, fragments and derivatives of the proteins encoded thereby. The preparation of such analogs, fragments and derivatives is by standard procedures (see for example, Sambrook et al., 1989) in which in the DNA encoding sequences, one or more codons may be deleted, added or substituted by another, to yield encoded analogs having at least a one amino acid residue change with respect to the native protein. Acceptable analogs are those which retain at least the capability of binding to TRAF2 with or without mediating any other binding or enzymatic activity, e.g. analogs which bind TRAF2 but do not signal, i.e. do not bind to a further downstream protein or other factor, or do not catalyze a signal-dependent reaction. In such a way analogs can be produced which have a so-called dominant-negative effect,

namely, an analog which is defective either in binding to TRAF2, or in subsequent signaling following such binding as noted above. Such analogs can be used, for example, to inhibit the CD40, p55 TNF and p75 TNF (FAS/APO1 and other related receptor effects, as well as effected mediated by various receptor associated proteins (adaptors) as noted above, by competing with the natural TRAF2-binding proteins. Likewise, so-called dominant-positive analogs may be produced which would serve to enhance the TRAF2 effect. These would have the same or better TRAF2-binding properties and the same or better signaling properties of the natural TRAF2-binding proteins. In an analogous fashion, biologically active fragments of the clones of the invention may be prepared as noted above with respect to the preparation of the analogs. Suitable fragments of the DNA sequences of the invention are those which encode a protein or polypeptide retaining the TRAF2 binding capability or which can mediate any other binding or enzymatic activity as noted above. Accordingly, fragments of the encoded proteins of the invention can be prepared which have a dominant-negative or a dominant-positive effect as noted above with respect to the analogs. Similarly, derivatives may be prepared by standard modifications of the side groups of one or more amino acid residues of the proteins, their analogs or fragments, or by conjugation of the proteins, their analogs or fragments, to another molecule e.g. an antibody, enzyme, receptor, etc., as are well known in the art.

Of the above DNA sequences of the invention which encode a TRAF-binding protein, (e.g. TRAF2-binding protein, such as for example, NIK) isoform, analog, fragment or derivative, there is also included, as an embodiment of the invention, DNA sequences capable of hybridizing with a cDNA sequence derived from the coding region of a native TRAF-binding protein, in which such hybridization is performed under moderately stringent conditions, and which hybridizable DNA sequences encode a biologically active TRAF-binding protein. These hybridizable DNA sequences therefore include DNA sequences which have a relatively high homology to the native TRAF-binding proteins cDNA sequence, (e.g. TRAF2-binding protein cDNA sequence, such as, for example the NIK cDNA sequence) and as such represent TRAF-binding protein-like sequences which may be, for example, naturally-derived sequences encoding the various TRAF-binding protein isoforms, or naturally-occuring sequences encoding proteins belonging to a group of TRAF-binding protein-like sequences encoding a protein having the activity of TRAF-binding proteins (e.g. TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example, NIK). Further, these

sequences may also, for example, include non-naturally occuring, synthetically produced sequences, that are similar to the native TRAF-binding protein cDNA sequence but incorporate a number of desired modifications. Such synthetic sequences therefore include all of the possible sequences encoding analogs, fragments and derivatives of TRAF-binding proteins (e.g. TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example NIK), all of which have the activity of TRAF-binding proteins.

To obtain the various above noted naturally occuring TRAF-binding protein-like sequences, standard procedures of screening and isolation of naturally-derived DNA or RNA samples from various tissues may be employed using the natural TRAF-binding protein cDNA or portion thereof as probe (see for example standard procedures set forth in Sambrook et al., 1989).

Likewise, to prepare the above noted various synthetic TRAF-binding protein-like sequences encoding analogs, fragments or derivatives of TRAF-binding proteins (e.g. TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example NIK), a number of standard procedures may be used as are detailed herein below concerning the preparation of such analogs, fragments and derivatives.

A polypeptide or protein "substantially corresponding" to TRAF-binding protein includes not only TRAF-binding protein but also polypeptides or proteins that are analogs of TRAF-binding protein.

Analogs that substantially correspond to TRAF-binding protein are those polypeptides in which one or more amino acid of the TRAF-binding protein's amino acid sequence has been replaced with another amino acid, deleted and/or inserted, provided that the resulting protein exhibits substantially the same or higher biological activity as the TRAF-binding protein to which it corresponds.

In order to substantially correspond to TRAF-binding protein, the changes in the sequence of TRAF-binding proteins, such as isoforms are generally relatively minor. Although the number of changes may be more than ten, preferably there are no more than ten changes, more preferably no more than five, and most preferably no more than three such changes. While any technique can be used to find potentially biologically active proteins which substantially correspond to TRAF-binding proteins, one such technique is the use of conventional mutagenesis techniques on the DNA encoding the protein, resulting in a few modifications. The proteins expressed by such clones can then be screened for

their ability to bind to TRAF proteins (e.g. TRAF2) and to modulate TRAF protein (e.g. TRAF2) activity in modulation/mediation of the intracellular pathways noted above.

"Conservative" changes are those changes which would not be expected to change the activity of the protein and are usually the first to be screened as these would not be expected to substantially change the size, charge or configuration of the protein and thus would not be expected to change the biological properties thereof.

Conservative substitutions of TRAF-binding proteins include an analog wherein at least one amino acid residue in the polypeptide has been conservatively replaced by a different amino acid. Such substitutions preferably are made in accordance with the following list as presented in Table IA, which substitutions may be determined by routine experimentation to provide modified structural and functional properties of a synthesized polypeptide molecule while maintaining the biological activity characteristic of TRAF-binding protein.

Table IA

Original Residue	Exemplary Substitution
Ala	Gly;Ser
Arg	Lys
Asn	Gln;His
Asp	Glu
Cys	Ser
Gln	Asn
Glu	Asp
Gly	Ala;Pro
His	Asn;Gln
Ile	Leu;Val
Leu	Ile;Val
Lys	Arg;Gln;Glu
Met	Leu;Tyr;Ile
Phe	Met;Leu;Tyr
Ser	Thr
Thr	Ser
Trp	Tyr
Tyr	Trp;Phe
Val	Ile;Leu

Alternatively, another group of substitutions of TRAF-binding protein are those in which at least one amino acid residue in the polypeptide has been removed and a different residue inserted in its place according to the following Table IB. The types of substitutions which may be made in the polypeptide may be based on analysis of the frequencies of amino acid changes between a homologous protein of different species, such as those presented in Table 1-2 of Schulz et al., G.E., Principles of Protein Structure Springer-

Verlag, New York, NY, 1798, and Figs. 3-9 of Creighton, *T.E.*, Proteins: Structure and Molecular Properties, W.H. Freeman & Co., San Francisco, CA 1983. Based on such an analysis, alternative conservative substitutions are defined herein as exchanges within one of the following five groups:

TABLE IB

1. Small aliphatic, nonpolar or slightly polar residues: Ala, Ser, Thr (Pro, Gly);
2. Polar negatively charged residues and their amides: Asp, Asn, Glu, Gln;
3. Polar, positively charged residues: His, Arg, Lys;
4. Large aliphatic nonpolar residues: Met, Leu, Ile, Val (Cys); and
5. Large aromatic residues: Phe, Tyr, Trp.

The three amino acid residues in parentheses above have special roles in protein architecture. Gly is the only residue lacking any side chain and thus imparts flexibility to the chain. This however tends to promote the formation of secondary structure other than α-helical. Pro, because of its unusual geometry, tightly constrains the chain and generally tends to promote ß-turn-like structures, although in some cases Cys can be capable of participating in disulfide bond formation which is important in protein folding. Note that Schulz *et al.*, *supra*, would merge Groups 1 and 2, above. Note also that Tyr, because of its hydrogen bonding potential, has significant kinship with Ser, and Thr, etc.

Conservative amino acid substitutions according to the present invention, e.g., as presented above, are known in the art and would be expected to maintain biological and structural properties of the polypeptide after amino acid substitution. Most deletions and substitutions according to the present invention are those which do not produce radical changes in the characteristics of the protein or polypeptide molecule. "Characteristics" is defined in a non-inclusive manner to define both changes in secondary structure, e.g. α-

helix or ß-sheet, as well as changes in biological activity, e.g., binding to TRAF proteins and/or mediation of TRAF proteins' effect on cell death.

Examples of production of amino acid substitutions in proteins which can be used for obtaining analogs of TRAF-binding proteins for use in the present invention include any known method steps, such as presented in U.S. patent RE 33,653, 4,959,314, 4,588,585 and 4,737,462, to Mark et al.; 5,116,943 to Koths et al., 4,965,195 to Namen et al.; 4,879,111 to Chong et al.; and 5,017,691 to Lee et al.; and lysine substituted proteins presented in U.S. patent No. 4,904,584 (Shaw et al.).

Besides conservative substitutions discussed above which would not significantly change the activity of TRAF-binding protein, either conservative substitutions or less conservative and more random changes, which lead to an increase in biological activity of the analogs of TRAF-binding proteins, are intended to be within the scope of the invention.

When the exact effect of the substitution or deletion is to be confirmed, one skilled in the art will appreciate that the effect of the substitution(s), deletion(s), etc., will be evaluated by routine binding and cell death assays. Screening using such a standard test does not involve undue experimentation.

At the genetic level, these analogs are generally prepared by site-directed mutagenesis of nucleotides in the DNA encoding the TRAF-binding protein, thereby producing DNA encoding the analog, and thereafter synthesizing the DNA and expressing the polypeptide in recombinant cell culture. The analogs typically exhibit the same or increased qualitative biological activity as the naturally occurring protein, Ausubel *et al.*, Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, Greene Publications *and Wiley Interscience, New York, NY*, 1987-1995; Sambrook *et al.*, Molecular Cloning: A Laboratory Manual, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Cold Spring Harbor, NY, 1989.

Preparation of a TRAF-binding protein in accordance herewith, or an alternative nucleotide sequence encoding the same polypeptide but differing from the natural sequence due to changes permitted by the known degeneracy of the genetic code, can be achieved by site-specific mutagenesis of DNA that encodes an earlier prepared analog or a native version of a TRAF-binding protein. Site-specific mutagenesis allows the production of analogs through the use of specific oligonucleotide sequences that encode the DNA sequence of the desired mutation, as well as a sufficient number of adjacent nucleotides, to provide a primer sequence of sufficient size and sequence complexity to form a stable

duplex on both sides of the deletion junction being traversed. Typically, a primer of about 20 to 25 nucleotides in length is preferred, with about 5 to 10 complementing nucleotides on each side of the sequence being altered. In general, the technique of site-specific mutagenesis is well known in the art, as exemplified by publications such as Adelman *et al.*, *DNA* 2:183 (1983), the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

As will be appreciated, the site-specific mutagenesis technique typically employs a phage vector that exists in both a single-stranded and double-stranded form. Typical vectors useful in site-directed mutagenesis include vectors such as the M13 phage, for example, as disclosed by Messing *et al.*, *Third Cleveland Symposium on Macromolecules and Recombinant DNA*, Editor A. Walton, Elsevier, Amsterdam (1981), the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. These phages are readily available commercially and their use is generally well known to those skilled in the art. Alternatively, plasmid vectors that contain a single-stranded phage origin of replication (Veira *et al.*, *Meth. Enzymol.* 153:3, 1987) may be employed to obtain single-stranded DNA.

In general, site-directed mutagenesis in accordance herewith is performed by first obtaining a single-stranded vector that includes within its sequence a DNA sequence that encodes the relevant polypeptide. An oligonucleotide primer bearing the desired mutated sequence is prepared synthetically by automated DNA/oligonucleotide synthesis. This primer is then annealed with the single-stranded protein-sequence-containing vector, and subjected to DNA-polymerizing enzymes such as *E. coli* polymerase I Klenow fragment, to complete the synthesis of the mutation-bearing strand. Thus, a mutated sequence and the second strand bears the desired mutation. This heteroduplex vector is then used to transform appropriate cells, such as *E. coli* JM101 cells, and clones are selected that include recombinant vectors bearing the mutated sequence arrangement.

After such a clone is selected, the mutated TRAF-binding protein sequence may be removed and placed in an appropriate vector, generally a transfer or expression vector of the type that may be employed for transfection of an appropriate host.

Accordingly, gene or nucleic acid encoding for a TRAF-binding protein can also be detected, obtained and/or modified, *in vitro*, *in situ* and/or *in vivo*, by the use of known DNA or RNA amplification techniques, such as PCR and chemical oligonucleotide synthesis. PCR allows for the amplification (increase in number) of specific DNA sequences by repeated DNA polymerase reactions. This reaction can be used as a

replacement for cloning; all that is required is a knowledge of the nucleic acid sequence. In order to carry out PCR, primers are designed which are complementary to the sequence of interest. The primers are then generated by automated DNA synthesis. Because primers can be designed to hybridize to any part of the gene, conditions can be created such that mismatches in complementary base pairing can be tolerated. Amplification of these mismatched regions can lead to the synthesis of a mutagenized product resulting in the generation of a peptide with new properties (i.e., site directed mutagenesis). See also, e.g., Ausubel, *supra*, Ch. 16. Also, by coupling complementary DNA (cDNA) synthesis, using reverse transcriptase, with PCR, RNA can be used as the starting material for the synthesis of the extracellular domain of a prolactin receptor without cloning.

Furthermore, PCR primers can be designed to incorporate new restriction sites or other features such as termination codons at the ends of the gene segment to be amplified. This placement of restriction sites at the 5' and 3' ends of the amplified gene sequence allows for gene segments encoding TRAF-binding protein or a fragment thereof to be custom designed for ligation other sequences and/or cloning sites in vectors.

PCR and other methods of amplification of RNA and/or DNA are well known in the art and can be used according to the present invention without undue experimentation, based on the teaching and guidance presented herein. Known methods of DNA or RNA amplification include, but are not limited to polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and related amplification processes (see, e.g., U.S. patent Nos. 4,683,195, 4,683,202, 4,800,159, 4,965,188, to Mullis *et al.*; 4,795,699 and 4,921,794 to Tabor *et al.*; 5,142,033 to Innis; 5,122,464 to Wilson *et al.*; 5,091,310 to Innis; 5,066,584 to Gyllensten *et al.*; 4,889,818 to Gelfand *et al.*; 4,994,370 to Silver *et al.*; 4,766,067 to Biswas; 4,656,134 to Ringold; and Innis *et al.*, eds., *PCR Protocols: A Guide to Method and Applications*) and RNA mediated amplification which uses anti-sense RNA to the target sequence as a template for double stranded DNA synthesis (U.S. patent No. 5,130,238 to Malek *et al.*, with the tradename NASBA); and immuno-PCR which combines the use of DNA amplification with antibody labeling (Ruzicka *et al.*, *Science* 260:487 (1993); Sano *et al.*, *Science* 258:120 (1992); Sano *et al.*, *Biotechniques* 9:1378 (1991)), the entire contents of which patents and reference are entirely incorporated herein by reference.

In an analogous fashion, biologically active fragments of TRAF-binding proteins (e.g. those of any of the TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example NIK) or its

isoforms) may be prepared as noted above with respect to the analogs of TRAF-binding proteins. Suitable fragments of TRAF-binding proteins are those which retain the TRAF-binding protein capability and which can mediate the biological activity of TRAF proteins or other proteins associated with TRAF proteins directly or indirectly. Accordingly, TRAF-binding protein fragments can be prepared which have a dominant-negative or a dominant-positive effect as noted above with respect to the analogs. It should be noted that these fragments represent a special class of the analogs of the invention, namely, they are defined portions of TRAF-binding proteins derived from the full TRAF-binding protein sequence (e.g., from that of any one of the TRAF2-binding proteins, such as, for example NIK or its isoforms), each such portion or fragment having any of the above-noted desired activities. Such fragment may be, e.g., a peptide.

Similarly, derivatives may be prepared by standard modifications of the side groups of one or more amino acid residues of the TRAF-binding protein, its analogs or fragments, or by conjugation of the TRAF-binding protein, its analogs or fragments, to another molecule e.g. an antibody, enzyme, receptor, etc., as are well known in the art. Accordingly, "derivatives" as used herein covers derivatives which may be prepared from the functional groups which occur as side chains on the residues or the N- or C-terminal groups, by means known in the art, and are included in the invention. Derivatives may have chemical moieties such as carbohydrate or phosphate residues, provided such a fraction has the same or higher biological activity as TRAF-binding proteins.

For example, derivatives may include aliphatic esters of the carboxyl groups, amides of the carboxyl groups by reaction with ammonia or with primary or secondary amines, N-acyl derivatives or free amino groups of the amino acid residues formed with acyl moieties (e.g., alkanoyl or carbocyclic aroyl groups) or O-acyl derivatives of free hydroxyl group (for example that of seryl or threonyl residues) formed with acyl moieties.

The term "derivatives" is intended to include only those derivatives that do not change one amino acid to another of the twenty commonly occurring natural amino acids.

A TRAF-binding protein is a protein or polypeptide, i.e. a sequence of amino acid residues. A polypeptide consisting of a larger sequence which includes the entire sequence of a TRAF-binding protein, in accordance with the definitions herein, is intended to be included within the scope of such a polypeptide as long as the additions do not affect the basic and novel characteristics of the invention, i.e., if they either retain or increase the

biological activity of TRAF-binding protein or can be cleaved to leave a protein or polypeptide having the biological activity of TRAF-binding protein. Thus, for example, the present invention is intended to include fusion proteins of TRAF-binding protein with other amino acids or peptides.

As mentioned above, it should be understood that the above 'TRAF-binding' proteins of the invention are any proteins which may bind and mediate/modulate the activity of any TRAF protein intracellularly. Particular examples are the TRAF2-binding proteins which can modulate or mediate the TRAF2-associated intracellular signaling activity, as mentioned above, especially as concerns TRAF2's involvement in inducing NF-κB activity, in particular, following the interaction between TRAF2 and various members of the TNF/NGF receptor family and/or their associated adaptor proteins as detailed above and below. A specific example of such TRAF2-binding proteins is the NIK protein and its various analogs, fragments, etc. (see Examples) which appears to bind TRAF2 very specifically and to have a direct action in inducing NF-κB activity, with various NIK dominant-negative analogs/muteins blocking this activity.

All the above mentioned modifications are in the scope of the invention provided they preserved the ability of the encoded proteins or polypeptides or their analogs and derivatives thereof, to bind at least the 222-501 amino acid sequence of TRAF2.

All the proteins and polypeptides of the invention by virtue of their capability to bind to TRAF2, are considered as mediators or modulators of TRAF2 signaling. As such, said molecules of the invention have a role in, for example, the signaling process in which the binding of TRAF2 ligand to CD30, CD40, lymphotoxin beta (LT-β) receptor, p55 or p75 TNF receptors, as well as the other receptors and adaptor proteins noted herein above, leads to activation of the transcription factor NF-κB. Particularly interesting is protein NIK and a partial NIK protein, encoded by clone 10 of the invention; a detailed sequence analysis of NIK and this clone-10-encoded protein (originally termed NMPI) disclosed encoded amino acid sequences corresponding to I - XI conserved motifs characteristic to Ser/Thr protein kinases, thus assigning a function to this protein.

The new clones proteins, their analogs, fragments and derivatives have a number of possible uses, for example:

(i) They may be used to mimic or enhance NFκB activity, the function of TRAF2 and the receptors to which they bind, in situations where an enhanced function is desired

such as in anti-tumor or immuno-stimulatory applications where the TRAF2- induced effects are desired. In this case the proteins of the invention, their analogs, fragments or derivatives, which enhance the TRAF2 or receptors effects, may be introduced to the cells by standard procedures known per se. For example, as the proteins encoded by the DNA clones of the invention are intracellular and they should be introduced only into the cells where the TRAF2 effect is desired, a system for specific introduction of these proteins into the cells is necessary. One way of doing this is by creating a recombinant animal virus e.g. one derived from Vaccinia, to the DNA of which the following two genes will be introduced: the gene encoding a ligand that binds to cell surface proteins specifically expressed by the cells e.g. ones such as the AIDs (HIV) virus gp120 protein which binds specifically to some cells (CD4 lymphocytes and related leukemias) or any other ligand that binds specifically to cells carrying a receptor that binds TRAF2, such that the recombinant virus vector will be capable of binding such cells; and the gene encoding the proteins of the invention. Thus, expression of the cell-surface-binding protein on the surface of the virus will target the virus specifically to the tumor cell or other receptor- carrying cell, following which the proteins encoding sequences will be introduced into the cells via the virus, and once expressed in the cells will result in enhancement of the receptor or TRAF2 effect leading to a desired immuno-stimulatory effect in these cells. Construction of such recombinant animal virus is by standard procedures (see for example, Sambrook et al., 1989). Another possibility is to introduce the sequences of the encoded proteins in the form of oligonucleotides which can be absorbed by the cells and expressed therein.

(ii) They may be used to inhibit the NFκB activity, the effects of TRAF2 or of the receptor that binds it, e.g. in cases such as tissue damage as in AIDS, septic shock or graft-vs.-host rejection, in which it is desired to block the induced intracellular signaling. In this situation it is possible, for example, to introduce into the cells, by standard procedures, oligonucleotides having the anti-sense coding sequence for the proteins of the invention, which would effectively block the translation of mRNAs encoding the proteins and thereby block their expression and lead to the inhibition of the undesired effect. Alternatively, other oligonucleotides may be used; oligonucleotides that preserved their ability to bind to TRAF2 in a way that interfers with the binding of other molecules to this protein, while at the same time do not mediate any activation or modulation of this molecule. Having these characteristics, said molecules can disrupt the interaction of TRAF2 with its natural ligand,

therefor acting as inhibitors capable of abolishing effects mediated by TRAF2, such as NF-κB activation, for example. Such oligonucleotides may be introduced into the cells using the above recombinant virus approach, the second sequence carried by the virus being the oligonucleotide sequence.

Another possibility is to use antibodies specific for the proteins of the invention to inhibit their intracellular signaling activity.

Yet another way of inhibiting the undesired effect is by the recently developed ribozyme approach. Ribozymes are catalytic RNA molecules that specifically cleave RNAs. Ribozymes may be engineered to cleave target RNAs of choice, e.g. the mRNAs encoding the proteins of the invention. Such ribozymes would have a sequence specific for the mRNA of the proteins and would be capable of interacting therewith (complementary binding) followed by cleavage of the mRNA, resulting in a decrease (or complete loss) in the expression of the proteins, the level of decreased expression being dependent upon the level of ribozyme expression in the target cell. To introduce ribozymes into the cells of choice (e.g. those carrying the TRAF2 binding proteins) any suitable vector may be used, e.g. plasmid, animal virus (retrovirus) vectors, that are usually used for this purpose (see also (i) above, where the virus has, as second sequence, a cDNA encoding the ribozyme sequence of choice). (For reviews, methods etc. concerning ribozymes see Chen et al., 1992; Zhao and Pick, 1993).

(iii) They may be used to isolate, identify and clone other proteins which are capable of binding to them, e.g. other proteins involved in the intracellular signaling process that are downstream of TRAF2. For example, the DNA sequences encoding the proteins of the invention may be used in the yeast two-hybrid system in which the encoded proteins will be used as "bait" to isolate, clone and identify from cDNA or genomic DNA libraries other sequences ("preys") encoding proteins which can bind to the clones proteins. In the same way, it may also be determined whether the proteins of the present invention can bind to other cellular proteins, e.g. other receptors of the TNF/NGF superfamily of receptors.

(iv) The encoded proteins, their analogs, fragments or derivatives may also be used to isolate, identify and clone other proteins of the same class i.e. those binding to TRAF2 or to functionally related proteins, and involved in the intracellular signaling process. In this application the above noted yeast two-hybrid system may be used, or there may be used a

recently developed system employing non- stringent Southern hybridization followed by PCR cloning (Wilks et al., 1989).

(v) Yet another approach to utilize the encoded proteins of the invention, their analogs, fragments or derivatives is to use them in methods of affinity chromatography to isolate and identify other proteins or factors to which they are capable of binding, e.g., proteins related to TRAF2 or other proteins or factors involved in the intracellular signaling process. In this application, the proteins, their analogs, fragments or derivatives of the present invention, may be individually attached to affinity chromatography matrices and then brought into contact with cell extracts or isolated proteins or factors suspected of being involved in the intracellular signaling process. Following the affinity chromatography procedure, the other proteins or factors which bind to the proteins, their analogs, fragments or derivatives of the invention, can be eluted, isolated and characterized.

(vi) As noted above, the proteins, their analogs, fragments or derivatives of the invention may also be used as immunogens (antigens) to produce specific antibodies thereto. These antibodies may also be used for the purposes of purification of the proteins of the invention either from cell extracts or from transformed cell lines producing them, their analogs or fragments. Further, these antibodies may be used for diagnostic purposes for identifying disorders related to abnormal functioning of the receptor system in which they function, e.g., overactive or underactive TRAF2- induced cellular effects. Thus, should such disorders be related to a malfunctioning intracellular signaling system involving the proteins of the invention, such antibodies would serve as an important diagnostic tool. The term "antibody" is meant to include polyclonal antibodies, monoclonal antibodies (mAbs), chimeric antibodies, anti-idiotypic (anti-Id) antibodies to antibodies that can be labeled in soluble or bound form, as well as fragments thereof, such as, for example, Fab and $F(ab')_2$ - fragments lacking the Fc fragment of intact antibody, which are capable of binding antigen.

(vii) The antibodies, including fragments of antibodies, useful in the present invention may be used to quantitatively or qualitatively detect the clones of the invention in a sample, or to detect presence of cells which express the clones of the present invention. This can be accomplished by immunofluorescence techniques employing a fluorescently labeled antibody coupled with light microscopic, flow cytometric, or fluorometric detection.

The antibodies (or fragments thereof) useful in the present invention may be employed histologically, as in immunofluorescence or immunoelectron microscopy, for *in situ* detection of the clones of the present invention. *In situ* detection may be accomplished by removing a histological specimen from a patient, and providing the labeled antibody of the present invention to such a specimen. The antibody (or fragment) is preferably provided by applying or by overlaying the labeled antibody (or fragment) to a biological sample. Through the use of such a procedure, it is possible to determine not only the presence of the clones, but also its distribution on the examined tissue. Using the present invention, those of ordinary skill will readily perceive that any of wide variety of histological methods (such as staining procedures) can be modified in order to achieve such *in situ* detection.

Such assays for the clones of the present invention typically comprises incubating a biological sample, such as a biological fluid, a tissue extract, freshly harvested cells such as lymphocytes or leukocytes, or cells which have been incubated in tissue culture, in the presence of a detectably labeled antibody capably of identifying the encoded proteins, and detecting the antibody by any of a number of techniques well known in the art.

(viii) The encoded proteins of the invention may also be used as indirect modulators of a number of other proteins by virtue of their capability of binding to other intracellular proteins, which other intracellular proteins directly bind yet other intracellular proteins or an intracellular domain of a transmembrane protein.

For the purposes of modulating these other intracellular proteins or the intracellular domains of transmembranal proteins, the proteins of the invention may be introduced into cells in a number of ways as mentioned hereinabove in (ii).

It should also be noted that the isolation, identification and characterization of the proteins of the invention may be performed using any of the well known standard screening procedures. For example, one of these screening procedures, the yeast two-hybrid procedure which was used to identify the proteins of the invention. Likewise other procedures may be employed such as affinity chromatography, DNA hybridization procedures, etc. as are well known in the art, to isolate, identify and characterize the proteins of the invention or to isolate, identify and characterize additional proteins, factors, receptors, etc. which are capable of binding to the proteins of the invention.

Moreover, the proteins found to bind to the proteins of the invention may themselves be employed, in an analogous fashion to the way in which the proteins of the invention were used as noted above and below, to isolate, identify and characterize other proteins, factors, etc. which are capable of binding to the the proteins of the invention-binding proteins and which may represent factors involved further downstream in the associated signaling process, or which may have signaling activities of their and hence would represent proteins involved in a distinct signaling process.

The DNA sequences and the encoded proteins of the invention may be produced by any standard recombinant DNA procedure (see for example, Sambrook, et al., 1989) in which suitable eukaryotic or prokaryotic host cells are transformed by appropriate eukaryotic or prokaryotic vectors containing the sequences encoding for the proteins. Accordingly, the present invention also concerns such expression vectors and transformed hosts for the production of the proteins of the invention. As mentioned above, these proteins also include their biologically active analogs, fragments and derivatives, and thus the vectors encoding them also include vectors encoding analogs and fragments of these proteins, and the transformed hosts include those producing such analogs and fragments. The derivatives of these proteins are the derivatives produced by standard modification of the proteins or their analogs or fragments, produced by the transformed hosts.

The present invention also relates to pharmaceutical compositions for modulation of the effects mediated by TRAF2. The pharmaceutical compositions comprising, as an active ingredient, any one or more of the following: (i) one or more of the DNA sequences of the invention, or parts of them, subcloned into an appropriate expression vector; (ii) a protein according to the invention, its biologically active fragments, analogs, derivatives or a mixture thereof; (iii) a recombinant animal virus vector encoding for a protein according to the invention, its biologically active fragments, analogs or derivatives.

The pharmaceutical compositions are applied according to the disease to be treated and in amounts beneficial to the patent, depending on body weight and other considerations, as determined by the physician.

As noted above, one of the specific embodiments of the TRAF-binding proteins of the present invention is the TRAF2-binding protein NIK. Based on the findings in accordance with the present invention that NIK binds specifically to TRAF2 and as such is a mediator/modulator of TRAF2 and can thus mediate/modulate TRAF2's activity in NF-

κB activation and hence its possible role in cell survival pathways in ways that TRAF2 functions independently or in conjunction with other proteins (e.g. p55 TNF and p75 TNF receptors, FAS/APO1 receptor, MORT-1, RIP and TRADD) it is of importance to design drugs which may enhance or inhibit the TRAF2-NIK interaction, as desired. For example, when it is desired to increase the cell cytotoxicity induced by TNF it would be desired to inhibit NF-κB induction, by inhibiting the TRAF2-NIK interaction or by inhibiting TRAF2 and/or NIK specifically. Likewise, for example, when it is desired to inhibit the cell cytotoxicity induced by TNF it would be desired to enhance NF-κB induction by enhancing the TRAF2-NIK interaction or by enhancing TRAF2- and/or NIK- specific NF-κB induction. There are many diseases in which such drugs can be of great help. Amongst others, (see above discussion as well) acute hepatitis in which the acute damage to the liver seems to reflect FAS/APO1 receptor-mediated death of the liver cells following induction by the Fas ligand; autoimmune-induced cell death such as the death of the ß Langerhans cells of the pancreas, that results in diabetes; the death of cells in graft rejection (e.g., kidney, heart and liver); the death of oligodendrocytes in the brain in multiple sclerosis; and AIDS-inhibited T cell suicide which causes proliferation of the AIDS virus and hence the AIDS disease.

In such cases, it would be desired to inhibit the FAS/APO1 receptor-mediated cell cytotoxicity (apoptosis) pathway and enhance the FAS/APO1 receptor-mediated induction of NF-κB via TRAF2 and the TRAF2-NIK interaction. One way of doing this would be to increase the amount of NIK in the cells or to increase the amount of TRAF2 and NIK so that the NIK- or TRAF2-NIK- mediated induction of NF-κB activation will be increased providing higher levels of NF-κB activation and hence cell survival; or so that the direct or indirect interaction between FAS/APO1 receptor and TRAF2 (or TRAF2-NIK) will be increased resulting in a decrease in FAS/APO1 receptor interactions with cell cytotoxic mediators (e.g MACH, see scheme in Fig. 2b) to provide for an increase in the induction of NF-κB activation and cell survival.

Conversely, in the case of, for example, tumors and infected cells (see also discussion above) it would be desired to increase the FAS/APO1 receptor-mediated cell cytotoxicity to bring about increased cell death. In this case it would be desired to inhibit FAS/APO1 receptor-TRAF2 (or -TRAF2-NIK) interactions and/or to inhibit NIK directly, and thereby to decrease the induction of NF-κB activity.

It is possible that NIK or one or more of its possible isoforms, analogs or fragments may serve as "natural" inhibitors of NIK itself or of the NIK-TRAF2 interaction, and as such serve as inhibitors of the induction of NF-κB activation. Such inhibitors may thus be employed as the specific inhibitors noted above, for example, those inhibitors to be used when it is desired to increase the cell cytotoxic effects of TNF or the ligand of the FAS/APO1 receptor in order to increase cell death. In fact, as exemplified herein below, various NIK analogs and muteins have been isolated in accordance with the present invention, which are kinase-deficient analogs/muteins and which are capable of blocking the induction of NF-κB activation mediated by the TNF receptors, the FAS/APO1 receptor, their associated proteins TRADD, RIP and MORT1; as well as mediated by the IL-1 receptor (which activation is via NIK but independent of TRAF2); and also as mediated by bacterial endotoxin (LPS), forbol myristate acetate, and the HTLV-1 protein TAX. Likewise, other substances such as peptides, organic compounds, antibodies, etc. may also be screened to obtain specific drugs which are capable of inhibiting the TRAF2-NIK interaction or the activity of NIK.

In a similar fashion, when it is desired to increase the NF-κB activation in various situations as noted above it is possible, for example, to increase the amount of NIK and/or TRAF2 in cells by various standard methods noted herein above (e.g. introducing DNA encoding NIK and/or TRAF2 into cells to induce increased expression, or preparing suitable formulations containing NIK and/or TRAF2 for direct introduction into cells, or any other way known to those of skill in the art). Likewise, other substances such as peptides, organic compounds, etc. may also be screened to obtain specific drugs which are capable of enhancing the activity of NIK or of enhancing the TRAF2-NIK interaction.

A non-limiting example of how peptide inhibitors of the NIK-TRAF2 interaction would be designed and screened is based on previous studies on peptide inhibitors of ICE or ICE-like proteases, the substrate specificity of ICE and strategies for epitope analysis using peptide synthesis. The minimum requirement for efficient cleavage of a peptide by ICE was found to involve four amino acids to the left of the cleavage site with a strong preference for aspartic acid in the P_1 position and with methylamine being sufficient to the right of the P_1 position (Sleath et al., 1990; Howard et al., 1991; Thornberry et al., 1992). Furthermore, the fluorogenic substrate peptide (a tetrapeptide), acetyl-Asp-Glu-Val-Asp-a-(4-methyl-coumaryl-7-amide) abbreviated Ac-DEVD-AMC, corresponds to a sequence in

poly (ADP-ribose) polymerase (PARP) found to be cleaved in cells shortly after FAS-R stimulation, as well as other apoptopic processes (Kaufmann, 1989; Kaufmann et al., 1993; Lazebnik et al., 1994), and is cleaved effectively by CPP32 (a member of the CED3/ICE protease family) and MACH proteases.

As Asp in the P_1 position of the substrate appears to be important, tetrapeptides having Asp as the fourth amino acid residue and various combinations of amino acids in the first three residue positions can be rapidly screened for binding to the active site of the proteases using, for example, the method developed by Geysen (Geysen, 1985; Geysen et al., 1987) where a large number of peptides on solid supports were screened for specific interactions with antibodies. The binding of MACH proteases to specific peptides can be detected by a variety of well known detection methods within the skill of those in the art, such as radiolabeling, etc. This method of Geysen's was shown to be capable of testing at least 4000 peptides each working day.

In a similar way the exact binding region or region of homology which determines the interaction between TRAF2 and NIK (or any other TRAF protein and TRAF-binding protein) can be elucidated and then peptides may be screened which can serve to block this interaction, e.g. peptides synthesized having a sequence similar to that of the binding region or complementary thereto which can compete with natural NIK (or TRAF-binding protein) for binding to TRAF2 (or TRAF).

Since it may be advantageous to design peptide inhibitors that selectively inhibit TRAF2-NIK (or TRAF-TRAF binding protein) interactions without interfering with physiological cell death processes in which other members of the intracellular signaling pathway are involved, e.g. MACH proteases of the cell death pathway, which are members of the CED3/ICE family of proteases, the pool of peptides binding to TRAF2 (or TRAF) or NIK (or TRAF-binding proteins) in an assay such as the one described above can be further synthesized as a fluorogenic substrate peptide to test for selective binding to such other proteins to select only those specific for TRAF2/NIK (or TRAF/TRAF-binding protein). Peptides which are determined to be specific for, for example, TRAF2/NIK, can then be modified to enhance cell permeability and inhibit the activity of TRAF2 and/or NIK either reversibly or irreversibly. Thornberry et al. (1994) reported that a tetrapeptide (acyloxy) methyl ketone Ac-Tyr-Val-Ala-Asp-CH_2OC (O)-[2,6-$(CF_3)_2$] Ph was a potent inactivator of ICE. Similarly, Milligan et al. (1995) reported that tetrapeptide inhibitors having a

chloromethylketone (irreversibly) or aldehyde (reversibly) groups inhibited ICE. In addition, a benzyloxycarboxyl-Asp-CH_2OC (O) -2,6-dichlorobenzene (DCB) was shown to inhibit ICE (Mashima et al., 1995). Accordingly, in an analogous way, tetrapeptides that selectively bind to, for example, TRAF2 or NIK, can be modified with, for example, an aldehyde group, chloromethylketone,(acyloxy) methyl ketone or a CH_2OC (O)-DCB group to create a peptide inhibitor of TRAF2/NIK activity. Further, to improve permeability, peptides can be, for example, chemically modified or derivatized to enhance their permeability across the cell membrane and facilitate the transport of such peptides through the membrane and into the cytoplasm. Muranishi et al. (1991) reported derivatizing thyrotropin-releasing hormone with lauric acid to form a lipophilic lauroyl derivative with good penetration characteristics across cell membranes. Zacharia et al. (1991) also reported the oxidation of methionine to sulfoxide and the replacement of the peptide bond with its ketomethylene isoester ($COCH_2$) to facilitate transport of peptides through the cell membrane. These are just some of the known modifications and derivatives that are well within the skill of those in the art.

Furthermore, drug or peptide inhibitors, which are capable of inhibiting the activity of, for example, NIK by inhibiting the NIK-TRAF2 interaction and likewise, the interaction between TRAF proteins and TRAF-binding proteins can be conjugated or complexed with molecules that facilitate entry into the cell.

U.S. Patent 5,149,782 discloses conjugating a molecule to be transported across the cell membrane with a membrane blending agent such as fusogenic polypeptides, ion-channel forming polypeptides, other membrane polypeptides, and long chain fatty acids, e.g. myristic acid, palmitic acid. These membrane blending agents insert the molecular conjugates into the lipid bilayer of cellular membranes and facilitate their entry into the cytoplasm.

Low et al., U.S. Patent 5, 108,921, reviews available methods for transmembrane delivery of molecules such as, but not limited to, proteins and nucleic acids by the mechanism of receptor mediated endocytotic activity. These receptor systems include those recognizing galactose, mannose, mannose 6-phosphate, transferrin, asialoglycoprotein, transcobalamin (vitamin B_{12}), α-2 macroglobulins, insulin and other peptide growth factors such as epidermal growth factor (EGF). Low et al. teaches that nutrient receptors, such as receptors for biotin and folate, can be advantageously used to enhance transport across the

cell membrane due to the location and multiplicity of biotin and folate receptors on the membrane surfaces of most cells and the associated receptor mediated transmembrane transport processes. Thus, a complex formed between a compound to be delivered into the cytoplasm and a ligand, such as biotin or folate, is contacted with a cell membrane bearing biotin or folate receptors to initiate the receptor mediated trans-membrane transport mechanism and thereby permit entry of the desired compound into the cell.

ICE is known to have the ability to tolerate liberal substitutions in the P_2 position and this tolerance to liberal substitutions was exploited to develop a potent and highly selective affinity label containing a biotin tag (Thornberry et al., 1994). Consequently, the P_2 position as well as possibly the N-terminus of the tetrapeptide inhibitor can be modified or derivatized, such as to with the addition of a biotin molecule, to enhance the permeability of these peptide inhibitors across the cell membrane.

In addition, it is known in the art that fusing a desired peptide sequence with a leader/signal peptide sequence to create a "chimeric peptide" will enable such a "chimeric peptide" to be transported across the cell membrane into the cytoplasm.

As will be appreciated by those of skill in the art of peptides, the peptide inhibitors of the TRAF-TRAF-binding protein interaction, for example, the TRAF2-NIK interaction according to the present invention is meant to include peptidomimetic drugs or inhibitors, which can also be rapidly screened for binding to, for example TRAF2/NIK to design perhaps more stable inhibitors.

It will also be appreciated that the same means for facilitating or enhancing the transport of peptide inhibitors across cell membranes as discussed above are also applicable to the TRAF-binding proteins, for example, NIK, its analogs, fragments or its isoforms themselves as well as other peptides and proteins which exert their effects intracellularly.

As regards the antibodies mentioned herein throughout, the term "antibody" is meant to include polyclonal antibodies, monoclonal antibodies (mAbs), chimeric antibodies, anti-idiotypic (anti-Id) antibodies to antibodies that can be labeled in soluble or bound form, as well as fragments thereof provided by any known technique, such as, but not limited to enzymatic cleavage, peptide synthesis or recombinant techniques.

Polyclonal antibodies are heterogeneous populations of antibody molecules derived from the sera of animals immunized with an antigen. A monoclonal antibody contains a substantially homogeneous population of antibodies specific to antigens, which populations

contains substantially similar epitope binding sites. MAbs may be obtained by methods known to those skilled in the art. See, for example Kohler and Milstein, Nature, 256:495-497 (1975); U.S. Patent No. 4,376,110; Ausubel et al., eds., Harlow and Lane ANTIBODIES : A LABORATORY MANUAL, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory (1988); and Colligan et al., eds., Current Protocols in Immunology, Greene Publishing Assoc. and Wiley Interscience N.Y., (1992-1996), the contents of which references are incorporated entirely herein by reference. Such antibodies may be of any immunoglobulin class including IgG, IgM, IgE, IgA, GILD and any subclass thereof. A hybridoma producing a mAb of the present invention may be cultivated *in vitro, in situ* or *in vivo*. Production of high titers of mAbs *in vivo* or *in situ* makes this the presently preferred method of production.

Chimeric antibodies are molecules of which different portions are derived from different animal species, such as those having the variable region derived from a murine mAb and a human immunoglobulin constant region. Chimeric antibodies are primarily used to reduce immunogenicity in application and to increase yields in production, for example, where murine mAbs have higher yields from hybridomas but higher immunogenicity in humans, such that human/murine chimeric mAbs are used. Chimeric antibodies and methods for their production are known in the art (Cabilly et al., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 81:3273-3277 (1984); Morrison et al., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 81:6851-6855 (1984); Boulianne et al., *Nature* 312:643-646 (1984); Cabilly et al., European Patent Application 125023 (published November 14, 1984); Neuberger et al., *Nature* 314:268-270 (1985); Taniguchi et al., European Patent Application 171496 (published February 19, 1985); Morrison et al., European Patent Application 173494 (published March 5, 1986); Neuberger et al., PCT Application WO 8601533, (published March 13, 1986); Kudo et al., European Patent Application 184187 (published June 11, 1986); Sahagan et al., *J. Immunol.* 137:1066-1074 (1986); Robinson et al., International Patent Application No. WO8702671 (published May 7, 1987); Liu et al., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci USA* 84:3439-3443 (1987); Sun et al., *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci USA* 84:214-218 (1987); Better et al., *Science* 240:1041-1043 (1988); and Harlow and Lane, ANTIBODIES:A LABORATORY MANUAL, supra. These references are entirely incorporated herein by reference.

An anti-idiotypic (anti-Id) antibody is an antibody which recognizes unique determinants generally associated with the antigen-binding site of an antibody. An Id antibody can be prepared by immunizing an animal of the same species and genetic type

(e.g. mouse strain) as the source of the mAb to which an anti-Id is being prepared. The immunized animal will recognize and respond to the idiotypic determinants of the immunizing antibody by producing an antibody to these idiotypic determinants (the anti-Id antibody). See, for example, U.S. Patent No. 4,699,880, which is herein entirely incorporated by reference.

The anti-Id antibody may also be used as an "immunogen" to induce an immune response in yet another animal, producing a so-called anti-anti-Id antibody. The anti-anti-Id may be epitopically identical to the original mAb which induced the anti-Id. Thus, by using antibodies to the idiotypic determinants of a mAb, it is possible to identify other clones expressing antibodies of identical specificity.

Accordingly, mAbs generated against the TRAF-binding proteins, analogs, fragments or derivatives thereof, (e.g. NIK, its isoforms, analogs, fragments or derivatives) of the present invention may be used to induce anti-Id antibodies in suitable animals, such as BALB/c mice. Spleen cells from such immunized mice are used to produce anti-Id hybridomas secreting anti-Id mAbs. Further, the anti-Id mAbs can be coupled to a carrier such as keyhole limpet hemocyanin (KLH) and used to immunize additional BALB/c mice. Sera from these mice will contain anti-anti-Id antibodies that have the binding properties of the original mAb specific for an epitope of the above TRAF-binding protein, or analogs, fragments and derivatives thereof.

The anti-Id mAbs thus have their own idiotypic epitopes, or "idiotopes" structurally similar to the epitope being evaluated, such as GRB protein-a.

The term "antibody" is also meant to include both intact molecules as well as fragments thereof, such as, for example, Fab and F(ab')2, which are capable of binding antigen. Fab and F(ab')2 fragments lack the Fc fragment of intact antibody, clear more rapidly from the circulation, and may have less non-specific tissue binding than an intact antibody (Wahl et al., *J. Nucl. Med.* 24:316-325 (1983)).

It will be appreciated that Fab and F(ab')2 and other fragments of the antibodies useful in the present invention may be used for the detection and quantitation of the TRAF-binding protein according to the methods disclosed herein for intact antibody molecules. Such fragments are typically produced by proteolytic cleavage, using enzymes such as papain (to produce Fab fragments) or pepsin (to produce F(ab')2 fragments).

An antibody is said to be "capable of binding" a molecule if it is capable of specifically reacting with the molecule to thereby bind the molecule to the antibody. The term "epitope" is meant to refer to that portion of any molecule capable of being bound by an antibody which can also be recognized by that antibody. Epitopes or "antigenic determinants" usually consist of chemically active surface groupings of molecules such as amino acids or sugar side chains and have specific three dimensional structural characteristics as well as specific charge characteristics.

An "antigen" is a molecule or a portion of a molecule capable of being bound by an antibody which is additionally capable of inducing an animal to produce antibody capable of binding to an epitope of that antigen. An antigen may have one or more than one epitope. The specific reaction referred to above is meant to indicate that the antigen will react, in a highly selective manner, with its corresponding antibody and not with the multitude of other antibodies which may be evoked by other antigens.

The antibodies, including fragments of antibodies, useful in the present invention may be used to quantitatively or qualitatively detect the TRAF-binding protein (e.g. NIK) in a sample or to detect presence of cells which express the TRAF-binding protein of the present invention. This can be accomplished by immunofluorescence techniques employing a fluorescently labeled antibody (see below) coupled with light microscopic, flow cytometric, or fluorometric detection.

The antibodies (or fragments thereof) useful in the present invention may be employed histologically, as in immunofluorescence or immunoelectron microscopy, for *in situ* detection of the TRAF-binding protein of the present invention. *In situ* detection may be accomplished by removing a histological specimen from a patient, and providing the labeled antibody of the present invention to such a specimen. The antibody (or fragment) is preferably provided by applying or by overlaying the labeled antibody (or fragment) to a biological sample. Through the use of such a procedure, it is possible to determine not only the presence of the TRAF-binding protein, but also its distribution on the examined tissue. Using the present invention, those of ordinary skill will readily perceive that any of wide variety of histological methods (such as staining procedures) can be modified in order to achieve such *in situ* detection.

Such assays for the TRAF-binding protein of the present invention typically comprises incubating a biological sample, such as a biological fluid, a tissue extract, freshly

harvested cells such as lymphocytes or leukocytes, or cells which have been incubated in tissue culture, in the presence of a detectably labeled antibody capable of identifying the TRAF-binding protein, and detecting the antibody by any of a number of techniques well known in the art.

The biological sample may be treated with a solid phase support or carrier such as nitrocellulose, or other solid support or carrier which is capable of immobilizing cells, cell particles or soluble proteins. The support or carrier may then be washed with suitable buffers followed by treatment with a detectably labeled antibody in accordance with the present invention, as noted above. The solid phase support or carrier may then be washed with the buffer a second time to remove unbound antibody. The amount of bound label on said solid support or carrier may then be detected by conventional means.

By "solid phase support", "solid phase carrier", "solid support", "solid carrier", "support" or "carrier" is intended any support or carrier capable of binding antigen or antibodies. Well-known supports or carriers, include glass, polystyrene, polypropylene, polyethylene, dextran, nylon amylases, natural and modified celluloses, polyacrylamides, gabbros and magnetite. The nature of the carrier can be either soluble to some extent or insoluble for the purposes of the present invention. The support material may have virtually any possible structural configuration so long as the coupled molecule is capable of binding to an antigen or antibody. Thus, the support or carrier configuration may be spherical, as in a bead, cylindrical, as in the inside surface of a test tube, or the external surface of a rod. Alternatively, the surface may be flat such as a sheet, test strip, etc. Preferred supports or carriers include polystyrene beads. Those skilled in the art will know may other suitable carriers for binding antibody or antigen, or will be able to ascertain the same by use of routine experimentation.

The binding activity of a given lot of antibody, of the invention as noted above, may be determined according to well known methods. Those skilled in the art will be able to determine operative and optimal assay conditions for each determination by employing routine experimentation.

Other such steps as washing, stirring, shaking, filtering and the like may be added to the assays as is customary or necessary for the particular situation.

One of the ways in which an antibody in accordance with the present invention can be detectably labeled is by linking the same to an enzyme and used in an enzyme

immunoassay (EIA). This enzyme, in turn, when later exposed to an appropriate substrate, will react with the substrate in such a manner as to produce a chemical moiety which can be detected, for example, by spectrophotometric, fluorometric or by visual means. Enzymes which can be used to detectably label the antibody include, but are not limited to, malate dehydrogenase, staphylococcal nuclease, delta-5-steroid isomeras, yeast alcohol dehydrogenase, alpha-glycerophosphate dehydrogenase, triose phosphate isomerase, horseradish peroxidase, alkaline phosphatase, asparaginase, glucose oxidase, beta-galactosidase, ribonuclease, urease, catalase, glucose-6-phosphate dehydrogenase, glucoamylase and acetylcholin-esterase. The detection can be accomplished by colorimetric methods which employ a chromogenic substrate for the enzyme. Detection may also be accomplished by visual comparison of the extent of enzymatic reaction of a substrate in comparison with similarly prepared standards.

Detection may be accomplished using any of a variety of other immunoassays. For example, by radioactive labeling the antibodies or antibody fragments, it is possible to detect R-PTPase through the use of a radioimmunoassay (RIA). A good description of RIA may be found in Laboratory Techniques and Biochemistry in Molecular Biology, by Work, T.S. et al., North Holland Publishing Company, NY (1978) with particular reference to the chapter entitled "An Introduction to Radioimmune Assay and Related Techniques" by Chard, T., incorporated by reference herein. The radioactive isotope can be detected by such means as the use of a g counter or a scintillation counter or by autoradiography.

It is also possible to label an antibody in accordance with the present invention with a fluorescent compound. When the fluorescently labeled antibody is exposed to light of the proper wavelength, its presence can be then detected due to fluorescence. Among the most commonly used fluorescent labeling compounds are fluorescein isothiocyanate, rhodamine, phycoerythrine, pycocyanin, allophycocyanin, o-phthaldehyde and fluorescamine.

The antibody can also be detectably labeled using fluorescence emitting metals such as ^{152}E, or others of the lanthanide series. These metals can be attached to the antibody using such metal chelating groups as diethylenetriamine pentaacetic acid (ETPA).

The antibody can also be detectably labeled by coupling it to a chemiluminescent compound. The presence of the chemiluminescent-tagged antibody is then determined by detecting the presence of luminescence that arises during the course of a chemical reaction.

Examples of particularly useful chemiluminescent labeling compounds are luminol, isoluminol, theromatic acridinium ester, imidazole, acridinium salt and oxalate ester.

Likewise, a bioluminescent compound may be used to label the antibody of the present invention. Bioluminescence is a type of chemiluminescence found in biological systems in which a catalytic protein increases the efficiency of the chemiluminescent reaction. The presence of a bioluminescent protein is determined by detecting the presence of luminescence. Important bioluminescent compounds for purposes of labeling are luciferin, luciferase and aequorin.

An antibody molecule of the present invention may be adapted for utilization in an immunometric assay, also known as a "two-site" or "sandwich" assay. In a typical immunometric assay, a quantity of unlabeled antibody (or fragment of antibody) is bound to a solid support or carrier and a quantity of detectably labeled soluble antibody is added to permit detection and/or quantitation of the ternary complex formed between solid-phase antibody, antigen, and labeled antibody.

Typical, and preferred, immunometric assays include "forward" assays in which the antibody bound to the solid phase is first contacted with the sample being tested to extract the antigen from the sample by formation of a binary solid phase antibody-antigen complex. After a suitable incubation period, the solid support or carrier is washed to remove the residue of the fluid sample, including unreacted antigen, if any, and then contacted with the solution containing an unknown quantity of labeled antibody (which functions as a "reporter molecule"). After a second incubation period to permit the labeled antibody to complex with the antigen bound to the solid support or carrier through the unlabeled antibody, the solid support or carrier is washed a second time to remove the unreacted labeled antibody.

In another type of "sandwich" assay, which may also be useful with the antigens of the present invention, the so-called "simultaneous" and "reverse" assays are used. A simultaneous assay involves a single incubation step as the antibody bound to the solid support or carrier and labeled antibody are both added to the sample being tested at the same time. After the incubation is completed, the solid support or carrier is washed to remove the residue of fluid sample and uncomplexed labeled antibody. The presence of

labeled antibody associated with the solid support or carrier is then determined as it would be in a conventional "forward" sandwich assay.

In the "reverse" assay, stepwise addition first of a solution of labeled antibody to the fluid sample followed by the addition of unlabeled antibody bound to a solid support or carrier after a suitable incubation period is utilized. After a second incubation, the solid phase is washed in conventional fashion to free it of the residue of the sample being tested and the solution of unreacted labeled antibody. The determination of labeled antibody associated with a solid support or carrier is then determined as in the "simultaneous" and "forward" assays.

As mentioned above, the present invention also relates to pharmaceutical compositions comprising recombinant animal virus vectors encoding the TRAF-binding proteins, which vector also encodes a virus surface protein capable of binding specific target cell (e.g., cancer cells) surface proteins to direct the insertion of the TRAF-binding protein sequences into the cells. Further pharmaceutical compositions of the invention comprises as the active ingredient (a) an oligonucleotide sequence encoding an anti-sense sequence of the TRAF-binding protein sequence, or (b) drugs that block the TRAF-binding protein- TRAF interaction.

Pharmaceutical compositions according to the present invention include a sufficient amount of the active ingredient to achieve its intended purpose. In addition, the pharmaceutical compositions may contain suitable pharmaceutically acceptable carriers comprising excipients and auxiliaries which facilitate processing of the active compounds into preparations which can be used pharmaceutically and which can stabilize such preparations for administration to the subject in need thereof as are well known to those of skill in the art.

The TRAF-binding protein and its isoforms or isotypes are suspected to be expressed in different tissues at markedly different levels and apparently also with different patterns of isotypes in an analogous fashion to the expression of various other proteins involved in the intracellular signaling pathways as indicated in the above listed co-owned co-pending patent applications. These differences may possibly contribute to the tissue-specific features of response to the Fas/APO1-ligand and TNF. As in the case of other CED3/ICE homologs (Wang et al., 1994; Alnemri et al., 1995), the present inventors have previously shown (in the above mentioned patent applications) that MACH isoforms that

contain incomplete CED3/ICE regions (e.g., MACHα3) are found to have an inhibitory effect on the activity of co-expressed MACHα1 or MACHα2 molecules; they are also found to block death induction by Fas/APO1 and p55-R. Expression of such inhibitory isoforms in cells may constitute a mechanism of cellular self-protection against Fas/APO1- and TNF-mediated cytotoxicity. The wide heterogeneity of MACH isoforms, which greatly exceeds that observed for any of the other proteases of the CED3/ICE family, should allow a particularly fine tuning of the function of the active MACH isoforms.

In accordance with the present invention there have also been isolated analogs/muteins of one of the TRAF-binding proteins, namely of the TRAF2-binding protein NIK. These NIK analogs/muteins (see above and see Examples below) are inhibitory to NIK-mediated as well as inhibitory to the induction of NF-κB activation mediated by the TNF receptors, FAS/APO1 receptor, their related proteins, the IL-1 receptor and other agents. Hence, as noted above, the TRAF-binding proteins or possible isoforms may have varying effects in different tissues as regards their interaction with TRAF proteins and their influence thereby on the activity of the TRAF proteins, or intracellular signaling mediated by the TRAF proteins.

It is also possible that some of the possible TRAF-binding protein isoforms serve other functions. For example, NIK or some NIK analogs, or isoforms may also act as docking sites for molecules that are involved in other, non-cytotoxic effects of, for example, Fas/APO1 and TNF receptors via interaction with TRAF2 or even independently of TRAF2.

Due to the unique ability of Fas/APO1 and TNF receptors to cause cell death, as well as the ability of the TNF receptors to trigger other tissue-damaging activities, aberrations in the function of these receptors could be particularly deleterious to the organism. Indeed, both excessive and deficient functioning of these receptors have been shown to contribute to pathological manifestations of various diseases (Vassalli, 1992; Nagata and Golstein, 1995). Identifying the molecules that participate in the signaling activity of the receptors, and finding ways to modulate the activity of these molecules, could direct new therapeutic approaches. In view of the suspected important role of TRAF proteins, e.g. TRAF2 and hence the TRAF-TRAF-binding protein, e.g. TRAF2-NIK interaction in Fas/APO1- and TNF-mediated NF-κB activation, it seems particularly important to design drugs that can block the TRAF-TRAF binding protein interaction, e.g.

TRAF2-NIK interaction when it is desired to kill cells (by inhibiting NF-κB activation), and conversely, when it is desired to preserve cells this interaction should be enhanced (to enhance NF-κB activation).

The present invention also concerns proteins or other ligands which can bind to the TRAF-binding proteins of the invention and thereby modulate/mediate the activity of the TRAF-binding proteins. Such proteins or ligands may be screened, isolated and produced by any of the above mentioned methods. For example, there may be isolated a number of new ligands, including proteins, capable of binding to the NIK proteins of the invention (such new proteins/ligands excluding the known TRAF2 and possibly IκB if NIK actually binds I-κB).

As detailed above, such new TRAF-binding protein-binding proteins/ligands, e.g. NIK-binding proteins, may serve as, for example, inhibitors or enhancers of NIK-mediated activity or the activity mediated by the, for example, TRAF2-NIK interaction, and as such will have important roles in various pathological and other situations as detailed above. Another function of such TRAF-binding protein-binding proteins/ligands would be to serve as specific agents for the purification of the TRAF-binding proteins by, for example, affinity chromatography, these new binding proteins/ligands being attached to the suitable chromatography matrices to form the solid or affinity support/matrix through which a solution, extract or the like, containing the TRAF-binding proteins, e.g. NIK, will be passed and in this way to facilitate the purification thereof. Such methods of affinity chromatography are now well known and generally standard procedures of the art.

Likewise, all of the above mentioned TRAF-binding proteins, analogs, fragments, isoforms and derivatives of the present invention may be used to purify by affinity chromatography the various TRAF proteins to which they bind. For example, TRAF2-binding proteins like NIK, and analogs, fragments and muteins of NIK (see examples below) may be used for the affinity chromatography purification of TRAF2. Hence in the same way as the NIK protein, analogs/muteins of the present invention were isolated and produced (see Examples below) using these methods and any other equivalent methods readily apparent to those of skill in the art (as detailed herein above), any other TRAF2-binding proteins may be identified and produced. Such a method for identifying and producing these TRAF-binding proteins, e.g. TRAF2-binding proteins will include a screening step in which the TRAF (e.g. TRAF2) protein, or at least a specific portion

thereof (e.g. the portion of TRAF2 between a.a. 222-501) is used as a substrate or 'bait' to obtain proteins or any other ligand capable of binding thereto; followed by steps of identifying and characterizing such proteins/ligands so-obtained; and subsequently producing such proteins/ligands in substantially isolated and purified forms. All these steps are well known to those of skill in the art and are detailed herein above and herein below.

The invention will now be described in more detail in the following non-limiting examples and the accompanying drawings :

It should also be noted that the procedures of :

i) two-hybrid screen and two-hybrid β-galactosidase expression test; (ii) induced expression, metabolic labeling and immunoprecipitation of proteins; (iii) *in vitro* binding; (iv) assessment of the cytotoxicity; and (v) Northern and sequence analyses, as well as other procedures used in the following Examples have been detailed in previous publications by the present inventors in respect of other intracellular signaling proteins and pathways (see, for example, Boldin et al., 1995a, 1995b, and Boldin et al. 1996). These procedures also appear in detail in the co-owned co-pending Israel Application Nos. 114615, 114986, 115319, 116588, 117932, and 120367 as well as the corresponding PCT application No. PCT/US96/10521). Accordingly, the full disclosures of all these publications and patent applications are included herein in their entirety and at least as far as the detailed experimental procedures are concerned.

EXAMPLES

Materials and Methods

i) cDNA libraries

a) B-cell cDNA library

Oligo dT primed library constructed from human B cells was used (Durfee et al., 1993). The cDNAs of the library were inserted into the XhoI site of the pACT based vector pSE1107 in fusion with GAL4 activation domain.

b) λgt10 testis cDNA library

A cDNA library from human testis was used. The library is a random hexanucleotide primed library with an avarage insert size of 200 to 400 bp.

ii) Yeast strains

Two yeast stains were used as hoststrains for tansformation and screening: HF7c strain that was used in the two hybrid screen and SFY526 strain that was used in the b-galactosidase assays. Both strains carry the auxotrophic markers trp1 and leu2, namely these yeast strains cannot grow in minimal synthetic medium lacking tryptophan and leucine, unless they are transformed by a plasmid carrying the wild-type versions of these genes (TRP1, LEU2). The two yeast strains carry deletion mutations in their GAL4 and GAL80 genes (gal4-542 and gal80-538 mutations, respectively).

SFY526 and HF7c stains carry the lacZ reporter in their genotypes; in SFY526 strain fused to the UAS and the TATA portion of GAL1 promoter, and in HF7c three copies of the GAL4 17-mer consensus sequence and the TATA portion of the CYC1 promoter are fused to lacZ. Both GAL1 UAS and the GAL4 17-mers are responsive to the GAL4 transcriptional activator. In addition, HF7c srain carries the HIS3 reporter fused to the UAS and the TATA portion of GAL1 promoter.

iii) Cloning of human TRAF2

The human TRAF2 was cloned by PCR from an HL60 cDNA library (for TRAF2 sequence and other details see Rothe et al., 1994; Rothe et al., 1995a; Cheng et al., 1996; Hsu et al., 1996; and Wallach, 1996). The primers used were: a) 30-mer forward primer CAGGATCCTCATGGCTGCAGCTAGCGTGAC (SEQ ID NO:8) corresponding to the coding sequence of hTRAF2 starting from the codon for the first methaonine (underlined) and including a linker with BamHI site. b) 32-mer reverse primer GGTCGACTTAGAGCCCTGTCAGGTCCACAATG (SEQ ID NO:9) that includes hTRAF2 gene stop codon (underlined) and a SalI restriction site in its linker. PCR program comprised of an initial denaturation step 2 min. at 94^{0}C followed by 30 cycles of 1 min. at 94^{0}C, 1 min. at 64^{0}C, 1 min. and 40 sec. at 72^{0}C. The amplified human TRAF2 was then inserted into the BamHI - SalI sites of pGBT9 vector in conjunction with GAL 4 DNA Binding domain.

iv) Two hybrid screen of B-cell library

The two hybrid screen is a technique (see details in above mentioned publications and patent applications) used in order to identify factors that are associated with a particular molecule that serves as a "bait". In the present invention TRAF2 that was cloned into the vector pGBT9, served as the bait. TRAF2 was co-expressed together with the screened B-cell cDNA library in the yeast strain HF7c. The PCR-cloned TRAF2 was a

recombinant fusion with the CAL4 DNA- binding domain and the screened cDNA library was fused to the GAL4 activation domain in the pSE1107 vector. The reporter gene in HF7c was HIS3 fused to the upstream activating sequence (UAS) of the GAL1 promoter which is responsive to GAL4 transcriptional activator. Transformants that contained both pGBT9 and pSE1107 plasmids were selected for growth on plates without tryptophan and leucine. In a second step positive clones which expressed two hybrid proteins that interact with each other, and therefore activated GAL1-HIS3, were picked up from plates devoided of tryptophan, leucine and histidine and contained 50 mM 3-aminotriazol (3AT).

v) β-galactosidase assay

Positive clones picked up in the two hybride screen were subjected to lacZ color development test in SFY526 yeast cells, following Clontech Laboratories' manual (for details see above mentioned publications and patent applications). In brief, transformants were allowed to grow at 30^0C for 2-4 days until reaching about 2 mm in diameter, then were transferred onto Whatman filters. The filters went through a freeze/thaw treatment in order to permeabilize the cells, then soaked in a buffer (16.1 mg/ml $Na_2HPO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$; 5.5 mg/ml $NaH_2PO_4 \cdot H_2O$; 0.75 mg/ml KCl; 0.75 mg/ml $MgSO_4 \cdot 7H_2O$, pH=7) containing 0.33 mg/ml X-gal and 0.35 mM β-mercaptoethanol. Colonies were monitored for development of blue color which is an indication for induction of β-galactosidase.

vi) Expression of cloned cDNAs

Two kinds of expression vectors were constructed:

a) A pUHD10-3 based vectors containing the open reading frame (ORF) of either clone 9, 10 or 15 in fusion with the Hemeaglutinine (HA) epitope.

b) A pUHD10-3 based vector into which FLAG octapeptide sequence was introduced just in front of cloned TRAF2, hereby named FLAG/B6/TRAF2.

The constructs containing an ORF of clone 9, 10 or 15 were transfected into HeLa-Bujard cells (for these cells see Gossen, M. and Bujard, M. (1992)) either alone or cotransfected with FLAG/B6/TRAF2 using standard calcium-phosphate method (Method in, for example, Current Protocols in Molecular Biology, eds. Ausubel, F.M et al.)

vii) Luciferase assay

Typically $5x10^5$ transfected cells were harvested by washing three times with cold PBS and resuspending in 400 μl extraction buffer (0.1 M K_2HPO_4/KH_2PO_4 pH=7.8; 1 mM

DTT). Lysis of the cells was achieved by three times freezing in liquid nitrogen and thawing. Cell debris was removed by centrifugation (5 min. at 10,000 x g). For the luciferase assay, 200 µl of luciferase buffer (25 mM glycylglycine, 15 mM K_2HPO_4/KH_2PO_4 pH=7.8, 15 mM $MgSO_4$, 4 mM EGTA, 2 mM ATP, 1 mM DTT) were added to 50 µl of the lysate. Subsequently, 100 µl of 0.2 mM D-luciferine, 25 mM glycylglycine, 1 mM DTT were added to the reaction. Luciferase activity was determined by readind light emission using a Lumitron luminometer set on 10 seconds integration (see above publications and patent applications for additional details).

Example 1: Cloning of new clones 9, 10 and 15

A cDNA library prepared from B-cells was screened for proteins that associate with TRAF2, using the two hybrid technique as described in Materials and Methods (iv). Only in transformants that expressed both TRAF2 and a protein capable of interacting with it, the GAL4 DNA-binding domain and the transcriptional activation domain were brought together. The result was the activation and expression of the reporter gene, in this case HIS3 fused to the UAS and the TATA portion of the GAL1 promoter.

The screen yielded approximately 2000 clones which were able to grow on Trp-, Leu-, His- 3AT plates. DNA prepared from 165 randomly selected positive clones served for transient co-transfection of SFY526 yeast srain together with TRAF2 cloned into pGBT9 vector. Assay for β-galactosidase activity was performed on the transformed SFY526 yeast colonies as described in Materials and Methods (v). The blue color that developed was an indication for yeast colonies that contain cDNA encoding a protein or polypeptide that binds to TRAF2.

The results of the two hybride screen; the ability of the picked clones to grow on 3AT plates and to induce LacZ as measured in the color test, are summarized in Table 1. Of the positive clones checked, two were cDNAs coding for known proteins; TRAF2 itself that is capable of self-associating and forming homodimers, and the lymphotoxin beta receptor whose intacellular domains were shown to bind TRAF2. Three of the cloned cDNAs (clones 9, 10 and 15) were novel.

The positive clones were further checked in a binding specificity test, namely checked for their interaction with irrelevant baits. As shown in Table 2, clones 9 and 10 reacted only with TRAF2 and did not bind to any one of a number of irrelevant proteins

checked. Clone 15, on the other hand, did not bind to MORT1, nor to the intercellular domains of the p55 and p75 TNF receptors, but did weakly bind to Lamin and to Cycline D.

In order to narrow down the region on TRAF2 molecule which interact with clones 9, 10 and 15, two additional constructs were made. One construct comprised of the N-terminal part of the TRAF2 molecule, amino-acids 1 to 221, that included the Ring finger and the ~~zink~~ zinc finger motifs. The second construct included only the C-terminal part of the molecule, amino acids 222 to 501, covering the "TRAF-domain" and additional 42 amino acids. These two constructs were served as baits in two hybrid tests. The results clearly show that while clones 9, 10 and 15 did not interact with the construct comprising amino acids 1 to 221 of TRAF2 molecule, they all did bind to the C-terminal construct comprising the "TRAF domain" with the same efficiency as they bound to the full length TRAF2 molecule.

Table II: **Summary of the results of the two hybrid screen using TRAF2 as a "bait", in which clones 9, 10 and 15 were picked up.**

Growth on 50 mM 3AT	Color test (min.)	ID/name of clone, as defined by its sequencing.	Number of independent clones
+++	10 min	TRAF2	150
++	20 min	new clone number 9	6
+++	15 min	new clone number 10	2
++++	10 min	Lymphotoxin beta receptor	2
+	15 min	new clone number 15	5

Table III : **Specificity tests**

(interaction with irrelevant baits in the two-hybrid test)

clone:	clone 9	clone 10	clone 15
bait			
LAMIN	-	-	+
cyclin D	-	-	+
p75-IC	-	-	-
p55-IC	-	-	-
MORT1	-	-	-
TRAF2	+++	+++	+++

Applying several PCR steps to cDNA clone 10, the full length cDNA was cloned from cDNA libraries obtained from RNA of human tissues. This protein was designated NIK for 'NF-κB inducing kinase' due to the fact that it contains a protein-kinase region (see below). It should be noted that the sequence of clone 10, when intially analyzed (before the obtention of NIK by PCR) was seen to encode for a protein, originally designated NMPI (see co-owned, co-pending IL 117800). This NMPI or clone 10 encoded protein was seen to have sequences corresponding to the I to XI conserved motifs that characterize Ser/Thr protein kinases.

Example 2: Sequencing of new clones

Three of the novel cDNA clones (clones 9, 10 and 15) were purified, amplified in E. Coli and their DNA was subject to sequence analysis. All three clones were found to be partial cDNA clones.

The total lengths of clones 9, 10 and 15 were around 2000, 2700 and 1300 base pairs, respectively.

Figs. 3 and 5 show the sequenced part of clones 9 and 15 and Fig. 4 shows the full sequence of clone 10 :

Figs. 5a-b show the entire nucleotide sequence of clone 15 sequenced from both 5' and 3' ends (a) and the deduced amino acids encoded thereby (b). Clone 15, which is a partial cDNA clone, was found to encode a 172 amino acid long protein.

Clones 9 and 15 are partial clones, which lack their most 5' end of the coding DNA sequences. The deduced amino acid sequences shown in Figs. 3b, 4b and 5b, are all started from the first nucleotide of the respective clone.

The sequence of clone 10 (a partial cDNA clone) which was most thoroughly analyzed, encodes for a protein called NMP1 as noted above, containing Ser/Thr protein kinase motifs. The full length cDNA clone obtained from PCR using the clone 10 as noted above revealed the new TRAF2-binding kinase NIK as mentioned above.

The full nucleotide sequence and its deduced amino acid sequence of NIK are shown in Fig. 6 in which the initiator ATG at nucleotide no. 232 is underlined, and in which the stop codon at nucleotide no. 3073 is indicated by a star. The fully sequenced NIK clone of Fig. 6 is 4596 nucleotides in length within which the NIK coding sequence is contained, this coding for a NIK protein of 947 amino acid residues.

Databank searches revealed that the new amino acid sequence of NIK shows particularly high homology to a group of kinases of which several are known to serve as MAP kinase kinase kinase.

Fig. 7 shows the alignment of:

mouse ~~MEKKK~~ ~~MEKK1~~ MEKK (S1),
BYR2 (S2),
Tpl-2 (S3),
Ewing's sarcoma oncogene (S4),
~~S33~~ SSC3 (S5),
(STE11) (S6),
(NPK1) (S7),
(BCK1) (S8), and
(NIK) (S9).

Some of those kinases have been identified by virtue of oncogene activity that they possess when in mutated form.

Example 3: Expression of cloned cDNAs and their Co-immunoprecipitation with TRAF2

HeLa-Bujard cells were ~~trasfected~~ transfected with TRAF2 tagged with FLAG in pUHD10-3 based expression vector and constructs containing ORF of either clone 9, 10 or 15 fused to HA epitope, as described in Materials and Methods (iv). Cells were then grown for 24 hrs. in Dulbecco's Modified Eagle's Medium (DMEM) plus 10% calf serum with added ^{35}S-Methionine and ^{35}S-Cysteine. At the end of that incubation time cells were lysed in radioimmune precipitation buffer (10 mM Tris-HCl, pH 7.5, 150 mM NaCl, 1% Nonident P-40, 1% deoxycholate, 0.1% SDS, and 1 mM EDTA; 1 ml/ $5x10^5$ cells), and the lysate was precleared by incubation with irrelevant rabbit antiserum and Protein G-Sepharose beads (Pharmacia, Sweden). Immunoprecipitation was performed by 1 hour incubation at 4°C of aliquots of the lysate with anti-FLAG (purchased from Eastman Kodak Co.) or anti-HA (clone 12CA5 (Field, J. et al. (1988)) monoclonal antibodies. The expressed proteins were analysed on SDS-PAGE gel followed by autoradiography.

The results of such experiments demonstrated that the partial cDNA clones 9, 10 and 15 encoded proteins of molecular weights around 50-65, 45 and 26 kDa respectively.

No interaction of clone 15 with TRAF2 could be detected, but the proteins encoded by clones 9 and 10 (NIK) as well as the full length NIK, were co-immunoprecipitated with the TRAF2 protein. Samples of cells that were co-transfected with TRAF2 and either one of these two clones and immunoprecipitated with either anti-FLAG or anti-HA antibodies followed by analysis on SDS-PAGE as described above, displayed three bands in each lane; one band corresponding to either clone 9 or 10 encoded proteins and the other two is a doublet of 42 and 44 kDa corresponding to TRAF2 protein.

Example 4: Functional tests

NIK was found to have NF-κB induction by gel retardation assay. Typically 0.5-1 x 10^6 293 EBNA cells were transfected with either 10 μg of clone 10 in pcDNA3 ~~(Fig. 7 lane 1),~~ 3 μg of pcDNA3 containing cDNA for the p75 TNF receptor ~~(Fig. 7 lane 3)~~, or with both clone 10 (10 μg) and p75 TNF receptor (3 μg) ~~in Fig. 7 lane 2~~. In each one of the transfections the total amount of transfected DNA was brought to 15 μg with the "empty" pcDNA3 vector. As a control serve 293 EBNA cells transfected with 15 μg pcDNA3 vector alone ~~(Fig. 7 lane 4)~~. Cells were grown for 24 hrs in DMEM medium + 10% calf

serum, then were harvested and treated according to Schreiber et al. (Schreiber, E. et al. (1989). Samples were run on 5 % polyacrylamide gel. NF-κB was monitored using a set of ^{32}P-radiolabelled oligonucleotides corresponding to the NF-κB binding site as probes. (The probes were GATGCCATTGGGGATTTCCTCTTT (SEQ ID NO: 10) and CAGTAAAGAGGAAATCCCCAATGG (SEQ ID NO: 11)).

As shown in Table IV NIK induced NF-κB even more effectively than TRAF-2. On the other hand, clone 10 did not have this effect at all.

Reporter gene assay was performed as follows :

293 EBNA cells were co-transfected with the pcDNA3 vector containing HIV LTR linked to the luciferase reporter gene, together with either pcDNA3 plasmid containing cDNA for the p75 TNF receptor alone, pcDNA3 plasmid containing clone 10 cDNA alone, or with pcDNA3 plasmid containing cDNA for the p75 TNF receptor and a pcDNA3 plasmid listed in Tables IV and V.

The results shown in ~~Table V~~ Tables IV demonstrate :

a) that clone 10 transfection does not activate NF-κB induction, while NIK strongly does (Table IV).

b) that clone 10 as well as NIK in which the active site lysine was replaced with alanine (NIK*) strongly inhibited NF-κB induction by the cDNA listed in the first column of Table IV.

Deletion of the 3' UTR of NIK (NIK-3'UTR) greatly increased its expression and consequently its ability to block NF-κB induction when expressed in the mutated form.

Table IV

Activation of NF-κB by NIK. Gel-retardation assay. Numbers are counts of radioactivity decay events as detected by 'phosphoimager' plate.

transfected cDNA	counts	area (mm^2)
empty vector	327	70.7
TRAF2	3411	70.7
NIK	6532	70.7
clone 10	343	70.7

Table V

Dominant-negative effect of clone 10, NIK K->A mutant on induction of NF-κB by overexpression of TRAF2, TRADD, MORT1/FADD, TNFR-i, TNFR-II, TNFR-I/FAS chimera, RIP and activation of NF-κB by NIK. Luciferase test.

Inducer of NF-κB	empty vector	NIK	NIK-3'UTR	clone 10	NIK*	NIK*-3'UTR	TRAF2 225-501 aa
TRAF2	300	1000		25	30		ND
TRADD	300	800	1000	100	100	5	ND
MORT1/FADD	300	1000		25	80		90
TNFR-I	200	800	1000	50	100	5	ND
TNFR-II	200	750	800	20	90	6	ND
FAS chimera	300	1200		25	50		30
RIP	300	800		75	50		ND
NIK	500			100		10	ND
TNF	200			80			
RelA	1000	ND	ND	1000	ND	ND	ND

Example 5 : Additional characteristics of NIK

In addition to the specificity tests of Example 2 above, further two-hybrid testing of the binding properties of NIK revealed (results not shown) that the initially isolated partial clone of NIK (NIK 624-947) binds specifically to the C-terminal region of TRAF2 (C-TRAF domain), while, in contrast, the full-length NIK bound to both the C-TRAF domain and a region upstream of it (N-TRAF domain). NIK also does not bind to TRAF3. Further, a chimeric molecule containing the C-TRAF domain of TRAF2 and the N-terminal portion of TRAF3 could bind the partial NIK molecule (NIK 624-947) but not the full-length NIK indicating that the binding of full-length NIK to TRAF2 requires both the C-TRAF and N-TRAF domains of TRAF2.

Moreover, NIK does not self- associate, nor does it bind to the intracellular domains of the : p55 and p75 TNF receptors; the CD40 receptor (a member of the TNF/NGF receptor family); and the FAS/APO1 (CD95 receptor). NIK also does not bind to the intracellular proteins associated with these receptors, such as for example TRADD, MORT1 and RIP. These results correlate with those shown in Table II above concerning the binding specificities of the proteins encoded by clones 9, 10 and 15. The various interactions between the various receptors and proteins are depicted schematically in Figs. 2a and 2b, Fig. 2b being more complete.

Northern blot analysis revealed that there is a single transcript of NIK expressed in various tissues at different levels, which transcript has a size of about 5000 nucleotides which is essentially the same as the cloned NIK cDNA (as noted above, see Fig. 6).

Furthermore, as noted above in respect of the protein encoded by clone 10 (originally designated NMPI), the full-length NIK protein also has a serine/threonine protein kinase motif similar to several MAP kinase kinase kinases (MAPKKK) as also arises from the sequence alignments shown in Fig. 7.

In vitro testing of NIK kinase activity revealed that NIK can be autophosphorylated, but not when the active-site lysine and adjacent lysine are replaced with alanine (NIK analog or mutein designated NIK KK429-430AA indicating that the lysines in positions 429 and 430 are replaced with alanines). This also correlates with the above results set forth in Example 4 and shown in Table IV with respect to the NIK* mutein.

As mentioned above, overexpression of NIK in 293 EBNA cells induced NF-κB to an even greater extent than overexpression of TRAF2, but overexpression of the partial NIK (NIK 624-947) did not bring about NF-κB activation. In addition, the above noted NIK analog/mutein NIK KK429-430AA also did not bring about NF-κB activation when overexpressed in these cells. Thus, induction of NF-κB by NIK depends on an intact kinase function of NIK. In contrast, RIP (see Figs. 2a, b) which also has a kinase domain can still induce NF-κB activation when its kinase activity is abolished by mutation.

The activation of NF-κB upon overexpression of NIK was indistinguishable from that produced by treating the cells with TNF, and as with TNF or TRAF2 overexpression, the principal components of NIK-activated NF-κB were p50 and p65. NIK overexpression caused the degradation of IκBα and blocking this degradation with N-acetyl-Leu-Leu-

norleucinol (ALLN) resulted (as with TNF) in the accumulation of IκB molecules having slower SDS-PAGE migration indicative of phosphorylated IκBα.

Other tests have revealed that NF-κB can be activated in 293-EBNA cells by TNF as well as by overexpression of p55 and p75 TNF receptors, or overexpression of a p55 TNF receptor in which the intracellular domain of the p55 TNF receptor is replaced by that of the FAS/APO1 receptor. NF-κB can also be activated by overexpression of TRAF2, TRADD, RIP or MORT1, but not by a MORT1 deletion mutant lacking the region upstream of the 'death domain' of MORT1. As noted above, full length NIK, but not the NIK mutein NIK KK429-430AA nor the partial NIK (NIK 624-947), induces NF-κB activation. Moreover, expression of the NIK KK429-430AA mutein or NIK 624-947 in 293-EBNA cells together with any of the other above noted agents, i.e. the receptors or associated proteins resulted in the blocking of induction of NF-κB activation by all of these agents, indicating that NIK activity is directly involved in this NF-κB induction. Likewise the above observed inhibition by inactive NIK molecules correlates with less IκB reduction.

NF-κB is also activated by IL-1 (see scheme in Fig. 2b). This effect is apparently independent of TRAF2 (IL-1 does not bind TRAF2 and the IL-1 effect is not blocked by the expression of a TRAF2 dominant-negative mutant). However, this IL-1 effect is inhibited by the expression of NIK mutants. In addition, the NF-κB activity observed upon overexpression of the p65 Rel homologue in 293-EBNA cells was unaffected by co-expression of kinase-deficient NIK mutants, indicating that NIK does not affect the function of Rel proteins directly, but participates in their receptor-induced activation.

The cytotoxic activity of TNF (apparently mediated by MORT1-associated protease MACH - see Fig. 2b) is subject to negative regulation by some NF-κB-inducible genes. The antagonizing consequences of NF-κB-mediated gene induction and MACH activation may explain why TNF itself, as well as IL-1 can induce cellular resistance to TNF cytotoxicity. In line with this, it has also been found in accordance with the present invention that the expression of NIK dominant-negative mutants in 293-EBNA cells significantly increased their susceptibility to killing by TNF, and that overexpression of native (full-length, wild-type) NIK inhibited the killing of the cells by TNF or by overexpression of the p55 TNF receptor (this receptor has an intracellular domain containing a 'death domain' region that when expressed in cells, in the absence of any TNF, can induce on its own cell cytotoxicity

- see above referred-to publications of present inventors and co-owned, co-pending applications).

Example 6 : Further functional tests for NIK biological activity

In accordance with the present invention, it has also been found that expression of NIK dominant-negative mutants could also block the induction of NF-κB activation in 293-EBNA cells by other inducing agents including : (i) the well known bacterial endotoxin, lipopolysaccharide (LPS); (ii) a well known forbol myristate acetate, which is a known protein kinase C activator; and (iii) the HTLV-1 protein TAX.

Furthermore, the expression of dominant-negative mutants of NIK in the 293-EBNA cells has been found to have essentially no effect on the TNF-induced activation of the Jun kinase indicating that NIK acts in a specific and possibly direct manner to enhance the phosphorylation of IκB without affecting the MAP kinases involved in Jun phosphorylation.

In view of all of the above mentioned it arises that the kinase activity of NIK is part of a signaling cascade that is responsible for NF-κB activation and which cascade is common to the two TNF receptors, the FAS/APO1 receptor and the IL-1-receptor. NIK appears to play a specific role in this cascade. The binding of NIK to TRAF2 may serve to enable NIK to be affected by both the TNF receptors and the FAS/APO1 receptor. By analogy to the MAP kinase cascades, NIK may serve as a substrate for a kinase (MAPKKKK) upon being recruited by TRAF2 to the stimulated receptors, so that when NIK is phosphorylated it phosphorylates and activates other kinases (or may induce directly NF-κB activation by direct phosphorylation of IκB). The IL-1-induced NF-κB activation is independent of TRAF2 and hence the activation of NIK by the IL-1-receptor may be mediated by another protein IRAK, a serine/threonine kinase that is recruited to the IL-1 receptor after stimulation (Cao et al., 1996b), and also by TRAF6 which binds IRAK (see Cao et al., 1996a, as well as scheme in Fig. 2b). As noted above, the target of NIK, or of a cascade of kinases activated by it, is likely to be IκB. NIK may also phosphorylate TRAF proteins or regulatory proteins that bind to them for example TANK-I/TRAF (see Cheng and Baltimore, 1996; Rothe et al., 1996) creating docking sites for other proteins.

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